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MISS "LAVVY".

MISS BADSWORTH, M.F.H.

BY

EYRE HUSSEY

AUTHOR OF

"ON ACCOUNT OF SARAH," "DULCINEA," "CARITA," ETC.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. D. ARMOUR

R. W. CROTHERS,
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TO

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF BEAUFORT

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER I.

"EQUALITY, my dear Lavinia! Fiddlesticks! You might just as well talk of the equality of light and darkness as the equality of men and women. Light and darkness, very useful things in their way, but of course both capable of abuse; light enables us to get about our business, 'Who the day for toil has given, For rest the night,' as the hymn says, both useful as I say in their way, but by no stretch of imagination can you put them on an equality. Man is man, and will have man's functions and responsibilities to the end of the chapter; woman has hers, and it will take a cleverer hand than yours to put the two on a par, and don't you forget it."

Hugo Badsworth, Master of the Cranston Hounds in Dumpshire, at present in London on account of a spell of frost, was the speaker; he had been dining with his sister in Portman Square, and was at the moment airing himself in front of the fire, mounted apparently on an imaginary horse, and airing his opinions at the same time. A hale, hearty man of fifty, who hunted his hounds twice a week at his own expense, did his duty as a magistrate and county councillor, looked into all the matters of his estate, and farmed one hundred and fifty acres. It goes without saying that to be able to do all that, and do it well, he was a wealthy as well as an active man.

His sister Lavinia, fanning herself in a low chair, and regarding her brother with an air of superiority (which was, to say the least, aggravating), was five years his junior and a spinster. Why she was living in single blessedness was

known only to herself and some few individuals who were conversant with her history some twenty years ago. It was certainly of her own choice, for she was a tall, handsome woman, with a pleasant voice and an engaging manner when she relapsed into her genuine self; she was comfortably supplied with this world's goods; but she was energetic, and never having happened upon those things to which her energy could be legitimately applied, she had become discontented with herself, the world and women's lot generally, and consequently posed as a reformer.

Unrecognised flattery, toadyism and snobbery, each and all of which she would have abhorred if she had been aware of their existence, stimulated her, and at the moment under consideration she was regarded as a leader and shining light by those who sought to emancipate women from imaginary slavery. It will be easily understood that this formed the topic of conversation between her brother and herself.

"You don't understand the matter, Hugo," she said placidly. "If you could see with my eyes you would think as I do. What do you know about women? Hounds and horses, perhaps; but women, no."

The conversation had been going on for some time, and had commenced in a good-natured spar; both were warming to their subject. Hugo waxed hot; Lavinia, whatever she felt, showed outward coolness.

"I know what you mean," he said; "I'm a bachelor, well —er—don't forget you are a spinster." There was a covert meaning in the words, and Miss Badsworth bent her head in token that she was aware of both facts, and possibly that she knew the reasons also.

"At all events I know enough of women to be aware of their being most extraordinary creatures. I am saying nothing against them. I don't the least object to their society as a rule, though I could often put up with their absence in the hunting field. Just take that instance what do they know of sport? Many men are bad enough God knows, but women! It's no fault of theirs they don'

possess those innate qualities and the sense of fairplay which belong to men. Win, tie or wrangle is more in their line. Then, again, constitute a bench of female magistrates and what would become of justice? How many women can look with unbiassed mind on two sides of a question? No; you want to get them out of their element, and what would become of them? It would be like hunting an otter on dry land or a fox in a river. It's all nonsense, Lavinia, and I believe in your heart you know it."

"Indeed I know nothing of the sort, Hugo; if you ever had read history you would know that the influence of women has had much to do with the ruling of the world."

"Influence! Yes, that's quite another pair of shoes. I don't deny their influence; to my mind that is just what you are going to do away with if you have your will. A woman's influence hinges entirely upon her being a woman. I grant she can assist her husband immeasurably, though, if she has ambition, she may possibly ruin him; but put her by herself to take her own part and force her own way in the world, she'll go down in the vortex for want of some one to hold her up. The aim of a woman ought to be to marry, and marry well, to run in double harness; but who cares to marry an athlete, a sportswoman who endangers the lives of all concerned with her gun, or a would-be political shining light? Of course, there are circumstances which alter cases, Lavinia," he added, seeing a pained look in his sister's face, though it passed in a moment.

"And I am to sit still, am I, Hugo, and see my sex put upon and not reach out a finger to help them?"

"I don't say that; but if I were you I should recollect what old Æsop said about the fox who had lost his tail, as he called it. I wouldn't endeavour to persuade my sex to wear, well, hygienic clothes and things. I don't believe either you or any one, except a few soured and shrivelled spinsters, have the smallest intention of making yourselves objects of ridicule."

"People would soon get used to a nine days' wonder," Miss Badsworth said.

Hugo detected a tone which implied that his sister did not think it worth her while to argue with a prejudiced person. Again he resented it. "Why don't you come down to the country and find something to do? You used to get along pretty well when hounds ran. Up here you have got to make work. It's the wrong principle to go on; human beings were meant to do work not to manufacture it."

Hugo Badsworth gradually stoked himself up, and his sister, irritated under her calm exterior, returned shot for shot. Presently she brought on the climax.

"The fact is, Hugo, you men imagine yourselves to be alone capable of understanding your fellow human beings," she said.

"Not at all; many of them, especially females, are utterly unfathomable. Only a fortnight ago a ruffian was before the bench for knocking his wife about; she took out the summons, mind you, and because we decided to give him as much time as we could to think matters over in the intervals of his compulsory work, the woman abused us like pickpockets."

"Poor soul, I daresay her conscience told her that she had provoked the assault," Miss Badsworth said meditatively.

"Very likely, just what I say; she couldn't arrive at that conclusion beforehand, so she had to do it *post facto*. Very few women have heads for business, Lavinia, you may take your oath to that."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind. It seems to me that men make mountains out of every little molehill that comes in their way and call it business. I suppose that is what has brought you to town."

"That and the frost, yes," Hugo said shortly.

"Well, I hope you will do it and not talk about it."

"I should like to see you get through half what I do in a day."

"I daresay I should do it if I had to."

"Do you? Well, I'll say good night before we quarrel."

He said adieu and departed to his club. The air was

keen, the streets slippery, no signs of a thaw. Perhaps this was why his usual serenity was ruffled.

"Daresay she would get through my work or half of it! Hold up, this brute will be down in another minute"—as the hansom-cab horse made a clever recovery. "A pack of hounds, to hunt them twice a week in all weathers, magistrates' meeting, county work, Board of Guardians, a farm and, what's more, a bailiff—(he's down; no he isn't; well saved; a clever little nag)—to look after, by Jove, I'd like to see her do it; she would learn something if it was only to throw over her fads. A good sort at heart Lavinia, but woman's rights and rational dress, and—by Jove, ten miles home in pouring rain would wash that rubbish out of her; I wish it would rain cats and dogs now—ah, that settles it, lucky I sat well back."

The cab horse was down, the doors had flown open, and there was nothing left for Hugo Badsworth but to finish the journey to his club on foot.

In the smoking-room of the club his sister's arguments and a certain air of superiority kept recurring to him—they pursued him even more vigorously as he walked home to his hotel with a modicum of raw fog freezing to his close-cut grey whiskers.

"I wonder if women would learn if they were taught," he said aloud just before he got into bed.

An idea struck him, and he lay and chuckled as he meditated on his scheme. "The worst of it is, I shouldn't be there to see," he thought. "However, with me gone there would be no one to give her good advice; these faddists would have her at their mercy. Hum!"

Before his scheme had taken definite shape he fell asleep.

Miss Lavinia Badsworth smiled in a superior manner when her brother had left the room. It was quite clear to her that Hugo, bristling with prejudices, was quite as incapable of looking on two sides of a question as the women he had condemned, at least she thought it was quite clear; but notwithstanding a certain sense of satisfaction in the con-

viction that she was doing her duty and at the same time enduring a certain percentage of the sufferings of the early Christian martyrs, some of her brother's words came to her in the garb of home truths, there was something in what he had said, still no one could say that she was not doing some good. Unconsciously she sat and gazed into the fire, and her thoughts gradually wandered away to Cranston Lodge and the days when they were children together, merry and gay, unconscious of the time which would come and go bringing with it the stern realities of life; four of them, Hugo, Charles, Margaret, and herself. Of the four, Charles and Margaret had married. She and Hugo had kept in touch more or less all their lives, each had a disappointment somewhere stowed away at the bottom of their hearts to which neither alluded but which both revered in tacit silence. Margaret was dead, Charles had slipped somewhat out of their lives; a faulty link had snapped in the chain which bound them together—it was a paltry flaw and twenty years should have sufficed for its repair—but they had agreed to differ; people do sometimes for no particular reason that they can determine. It was late when Miss Badsworth retired to her bedchamber. She had enjoyed the luxury of mental wanderings over the past, but the only thing she took with her was a sense of want of confidence in her various schemes and yet a determination to go on with them.

On the following day Mr. Badsworth called on his lawyers in Lincoln's Inn to transact some business, and finding the senior partner at leisure spent an hour in arranging certain affairs of his own and the affairs of the nation generally; presently he started up :—

"It's raining, by all that's beautiful; I must be off!" he exclaimed, and left his legal adviser wondering why the circumstance of rain should suddenly stir a man to vigorous action.

After his dinner that evening Mr Badsworth went forth into the murky night; a soft drizzle was falling. "It'll take

three days to get this bone out of the ground," he said, but all the same he felt the satisfaction of a genuine sportsman as he held up his face in the direction where the sky was supposed to be, and allowed the particles of moisture to fall upon it.

In the sacred precincts of his smoking-room he lit a pipe, sat down at his table and wrote; he read his manuscript, erased words and sentences, made additions, and finally having brought the matter to a satisfactory conclusion, leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

Presently he rose, unlocked a drawer, taking from it a document; his face was grim as he read the superscription: "The last Will and Testament of Hugo Badsworth, of Cranston Lodge, etc.".

Not that Hugo Badsworth had any personal objection to his Will; he had often seen it since it was signed, and on more than one occasion had added a codicil; but there is something sobering in the sight of the final disposition of one's property, a sense of the coming time when one shall lay down the reins of government for aye.

Mr. Badsworth copied his manuscript upon the original document, read it carefully, and rang the bell.

"Is Hibbert near at hand?" he asked the butler who appeared. Hibbert was the stud-groom. "Tell him I want him to come and witness my signature with you," he added upon receiving an answer in the affirmative.

The master signed, the two servants witnessed the signature, and the former added the date.

Hugo Badsworth had done something unusual; he had made more or less of a joke in his last Will and Testament. He was aware of the fact, and in consequence his smile was grim. The drawback which had occurred to him before remained, he would not be there to see. He fortified himself with the belief that his action would do good, that certain old scores which were owing to those around him would be paid off, and that after his death some might be found to appreciate and regret him (this latter he did not care much about).

He had no intention of dying if he could help it, so the matter rested, and he pretended to himself that he was satisfied.

That was in the early days of February.

Before March was out he drew up another document, duly signed it in the presence of witnesses and stowed it away in a place of security; he would think the matter over, decide between the two, and submit the one which he fancied to his lawyers when the season was over.

CHAPTER II.

When Mr. John Morgan arrived at the little country town of Tordon in Cornwall he thought he had never seen a spot which might be more aptly styled "forsaken," but then he had made a long journey from Dumpshire, and had to give up his last two days of hunting with the Cranston. With April begun, and warm and mild at that, there was not much chance of sport, he thought, but then the love of hunting fits badly at first into the chrysalis stage which holds it dormant during the summer months.

Jack Morgan was keen, but Jack Morgan was good-natured, and an urgent appeal from a maiden aunt who had become suddenly anxious about the honesty of certain tenants of a small property in Cornwall had caused him to sacrifice the one good quality on the altar of the other. Mr. Morgan was of cheerful disposition, always inclined to look on the bright side of things, just thirty years of age, and possessed of enough to make him comfortably independent.

There were two things which redeemed the character of Tordon: one, the Duchy Arms Hotel, which, though primitive, possessed much homely comfort within; the other, the fact that the one main street of Tordon was built on a curve. In the latter case the spectator who listlessly gazed at the primitive architecture of the houses as he leaned against the portal of the Duchy Arms felt that there were possibilities in either direction; there were those attributes of hope which point out that the unexpected may happen, some one come, or something arrive from either direction. A long straight street would, for hours at a time, except on market days, have dashed these attributes to atoms.

Moreover, from Jack Morgan's view there was much alleviation of boredom in the fact that mine host of the inn, Tom Barlow by name, was a sportsman ; a fox's head and sundry specimens of stuffed birds in the entrance passage testified to the fact. It is true that they might have proved that their owner was a taxidermist of no great pretensions, but a glimpse of Tom Barlow said "perish the thought" ; his walk, the cut of his coat and breeches forbade so low a view. Residents within a radius of twenty miles knew that Tom was a judge of a horse, and was more than likely to know the history of any animal bred or owned in the neighbourhood, consequently frequent deputations of intending purchasers waited on him, and withal there was a tap of cider at the Duchy Arms which was not to be despised.

"What do folk do down here?" Jack asked, when having discussed an excellent dinner served in Mrs. Barlow's best style (she had been cook and housekeeper before she married, and acted on her precept that to keep menfolk contented you must find them good victuals) he gravitated to the only spot where sociability could be found, *viz.*, the comfortable bar parlour. Tom Barlow was smoking his pipe in the arm-chair from which he conducted the diurnal meetings of his customers; Mrs. Barlow was seated beside the table nearer to the lamp in order the better to execute her needlework, for her eyes, she asserted, "were not what they were," whilst a comely daughter knitting a pair of stockings was ready to attend to the behests of customers.

"Some minds their own business, and some knows all about other folks' matters," Tom replied with a smile that showed he was not answering the question of his guest.

"That's what happens in most places, isn't it? It's so in Dumpshire, but this spot looks different. I should have thought every one sat on his doorstep and whistled."

"Dumpshire?" Tom queried, sitting up in his chair. "You come from there, sir, do you? Mayhap you know Tod's farm?"

"To be sure, and Jimmy Edwards too; every one knows Jimmy, a right good sportsman and a capital farmer."

"That's my brother," Mrs. Barlow said with a commendatory smile at Jack's eulogy. "Our boy went up to learn the business, and then nothing would do but he must go hunting, and now he's whipper-in with the Cranston Hounds, and I blame Jim for it."

"What, Ned Barlow the second whip? He's a smart lad, and will get a huntsman's berth one day; the Squire thinks a lot of him. What a little world it is!"

Then the talk rushed into a torrent of give and take; sport was the thread which ran through it, and even Mrs. Barlow's scruples and suggestion that Ned would have done better to stick to his uncle were undermined by the tide of enthusiasm.

"Well, sir, you were asking but now what people did," Mr. Barlow said presently, having returned from the yard, whither he had been summoned by the ostler. "If I don't mistake you wanted to know what you was to do. You should go to Rockwell cross roads and see the Squire's harriers, it's about the last of the season, and maybe it's time it was; but anyway you'll see as pretty a pack as is to be found in England. It's true they mayn't be turned out as you're used to see them, but for doing their work they'd be hard to beat."

"Who is the Squire, as you call him?"

"Mr. Charles Badsworth. We always call him the Squire, for he's the country gentleman all over; he isn't a rich man by any means, but he's bound to have sport like all the family, and he and Miss Lavvy they shows it. He's brother to your Mr. Badsworth up in Dumpshire; I've heard they didn't get on, but there, that often happens in families. Squire Badsworth here was abroad a bit, and made some money, not much they say, and married; but foreign lands weren't made for Badsworths by no manner of means, so he just settled here and does a bit of farming. He's in the town here on market days as regular as the almanac, and knows every one hereabout, and a right good friend he can be. I wish——" Tom Barlow broke off as another person entered the bar.

Jack Morgan didn't quite know what to make of the newcomer. He might have been any age under forty, dark and rather good-looking, but his eyes shifted restlessly from one to another of the company, which detracted from any good qualities in his features. Jack wondered who he might be, but came to the conclusion that he wasn't strictly sober.

Mrs. Barlow acknowledged a familiar salute with "Good evening, Mr. Bickersdyke," but she glanced round quickly at her daughter as that gentleman said, "Scotch whisky, Miss Lucy, please".

Miss Lucy knew that the glance meant water. Mr. Bickersdyke seated himself and observed Jack Morgan closely; the latter took up the conversation where it had been left, and having discovered that Rockwell was only three miles distant, announced his intention of walking over to see the harriers next day. When Mrs. Barlow broke a silence (for her spouse appeared disinclined to proceed with the sporting reminiscences of an hour ago) with "How do your sketches get on, Mr. Bickersdyke?" Jack put him down as an artist.

"No better than this whisky, Mrs. Barlow; this isn't your usual tap," was the reply in a maundering voice, accompanied by an inane smile, supposed to be knowing.

"It's Black and White, isn't it, Lucy?" Mrs. Barlow asked, and Miss Lucy said "Yes".

"Then give me another, there's a good girl."

Endeavouring to occupy his attention Mrs. Barlow asked where Mr. Bickersdyke had been that evening.

"I only looked in on the Doctor for a bit."

"Then I wouldn't have any more whisky if I were you," she said persuasively.

"Why not? But you ain't me, you know, and I'm going to ask this gentleman," nodding to Jack, "to drink with me."

Jack aided Mrs. Barlow's efforts by saying he was much obliged but didn't require to take any more that evening, in fact was just going to bed.

Thereupon Mr. Bickersdyke waxed quarrelsome, and de-

clared that Jack had insulted him, having insinuated that he (Bickersdyke) was not good enough to drink with. Knowing that argument was useless against a person more or less intoxicated, Jack contented himself by saying he had no such intention, that he had had enough, and enough was as good as a feast.

"That means that you think I have had too much," Bickersdyke said, rising angrily and supporting himself with both hands upon the table. Tom Barlow with his broad back to the company put on the clock a quarter of an hour.

"Now you just sit down and behave yourself, Mr. Bickersdyke. I'm surprised at your talking to this gentleman like that; he has never said anything of the sort." Mrs. Barlow's manner was firm, and Bickersdyke obeyed.

"I'm always in the wrong, it always ish me, isn't it, Miss Lucy? Ish never can do right." Then in an injured tone he gave quite a pathetic account of his woes.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten.

"Now, Mr. Bickersdyke, it's closing time. I must ask you to go," Mrs. Barlow said. Tom Barlow knew his customer of old, and let his wife use her persuasive eloquence.

"Jush one more drop of Scosh."

"No, you cannot be served now."

"You refush serve me?"

"It's closing time."

"Then I shall summonsh you 'fore mashistrates."

"Very well, Mr. Bickersdyke, do so; but mind and be careful going home, and take care with your candle."

Mrs. Barlow's motherly voice had its effect.

"Nobody'd care if I broke my necksh. Good night, Mishish Barlow; shan't say go'night t'you," looking at Jack, "wouldn't share drinksh."

Tom Barlow saw that Bickersdyke's tottering steps bore him to the door in safety, and then closed it after him.

"Who's that?" asked Jack Morgan.

"A clever man who is killing himself with drink," Mrs.

Barlow replied. "He's an artist now, and some of his pictures are beautiful, but he has squandered the best part of his fortune in speculating and gambling on the Stock Exchange; I think he began with the law. You wouldn't believe what a pleasant man he can be when he's sober; but when he's drunk he is more like a devil. I can't understand how the Squire allows him up at Dewthorpe, he's there sometimes; but they do say they're some kin, uncle and nephew, or something."

"Not a very desirable kinsman, certainly," Jack remarked.

Tom Barlow lighted a candle and preceded Jack to his bedroom.

"I wasn't going to say anything before him," he said, nodding his head backwards as he put down the candle, "but if you like to ride one of my old nags to-morrow, you're welcome. He'll know the country, which is a bit of a change from Dumpshire, and you can ride him where you've a mind to. I shouldn't like a sportsman, and I know you are one, to go out from the Duchy Arms on foot. I've got to be away some hours on business, otherwise I would show you the way."

Jack was profuse in his thanks; here was a bit of luck. Instead of kicking his heels a whole day waiting for the tenant who was away burying his mother-in-law, he would be able to combine a glimpse of Cornish scenery with a glimpse of Cornish sport. No wonder he went to bed contented, and slept the sleep of the weary.

CHAPTER III.

"SIT back a bit when he leps, sir, he can't abide touching nothing with his hind legs," the ostler said, giving one finishing touch with the cloth he had in his hand as Jack Morgan issued from the archway of the inn yard.

"All right, Tim; I won't cut a voluntary in a strange land if I can help it," was the reply, as Jack according to directions turned up the village street.

A warm April sun overhead, tempered by a soft breeze laden with the peculiar attributes of the sea, foretold anything but a hunting day. "Never mind, it's a nice day to ride about," Jack thought, and forthwith fell to observing the country on either side of the road. A contrast indeed to Dumpshire, especially on the best side of the Cranston country, it certainly was; small fields, banks, stone-faced or otherwise, frequent stone walls, hills and valleys, and up away in the distance, moorland. Yes, that peculiar red brown, softened now and then by shadows, and shrouded in a blue mistiness, could be nothing else but moorland. The gorse here, there, and everywhere was in its beauty; a golden crown to some dyke, a patch of glorious colour on a hillside, handfuls of scattered gems in all directions. Occasionally a brook babbled over its stony bed in a little valley, disappeared into the vivid green of budding larches, and issued forth to glitter in the sunshine beyond. Skylarks, specks against the blue above, got rid of their superfluous energies and expressed their spring joy at the same time. Isolated trees upon hilltops testified by their slanting growth to the fact that there were times when the strong south-west wind swept in stormy gusts over the uplands; but to-day

these were matters of history, liable to repeat itself somewhen, but not now. "Magnificent, but not warfare; glorious, but not a hunting morning."

Yet, for all that, the Fates opened the page and flattened it out, and upon it much was writ which man could not know then, but did know afterwards. The company, such as it was, had mostly assembled, when Jack Morgan reached Rockwell cross roads. A lane joined the main road, and on one side of the latter a spring bubbled up from the bowels of the earth. There were marvellous properties attached to that spring, but of that Jack was ignorant. There was no doubt of the identity of the Squire; though sparer in figure, he resembled his brother sufficiently for Jack to recognise him, knowing as he did the fact that they were brethren (which makes all the difference). Tom Barlow was right when he said that the "turn out" did not equal the Cranston. Charles Badsworth's green coat had a russet, weather-beaten appearance, and he wore brown Bedford cords and butcher boots, but he sat his horse like a man used to the saddle; hunt servants there were none, the nearest approach to one was a girl at present holding an animated conversation with a jovial-looking farmer. A velvet hunting-cap that once had been black surmounted curly brown hair, a green jacket as rusty as her father's coat, and a short grey skirt constituted her attire, with just the feminine touch of a bunch of violets pinned to her breast; a horn case at her saddlebow, and a pair of couples left no doubt that this was Miss Lavvy of whom Tom Barlow had spoken.

It is to be feared Jack Morgan looked over the girl before he looked over the pack which clustered round the master's horse. A good-looking girl decidedly, broad-shouldered and well set up, hale, hearty and good-tempered was the verdict; then Jack looked at her mount, an active Galloway, hard as nails and well bred; finally his eyes fell upon a terrier seated close beside the girl's horse apart from the pack, a broken-haired terrier, white with a black head, and one black spot at the root of his tail; game as a pebble, Jack thought. The

pack was a small one, nine and a half couples, level, strong, active, in the pink of condition, and evidently bred and selected with the utmost care.

It was a day to loiter, and Jack felt he could be content to sit on his horse and enjoy the prospect and his immediate surroundings for an hour; but Charles Badsworth never loitered. After a brief consultation with some neighbour he said, "I'll go down there first," and then as Jack drew his horse to the side of the road he was greeted courteously with "Good morning, sir. Glad you have come to have a look at us. Tom Barlow's horse, and a good one too, I see." The voice might have been the voice of the Squire of Cranston.

"Down to the right, Squire, I think," the consultee said, as they turned in at a gateway. The master acknowledged the suggestion with a wave of the hand, and said something which to Jack sounded like "Get forth" in a cheery voice.

The pack spread itself in all directions, and the master rode slowly on, the girl wide of him to one side now deserted by the terrier.

Jack totted up the field; what a contrast to the Cranston: thirteen all told. Some busied themselves in the search for a hare; others, of whom Jack was one, sat still and watched.

The large rushy pasture was tried in vain, and then the master negotiated the bank which divided it from the next field, and his daughter did the same lower down.

Now a bank is a bank, and a stranger to a bank, be he horse or man, is frequently deceived thereby. Jack Morgan was grateful that he was not riding a certain chestnut horse now standing in his stable at home, well known for his brilliant powers with the Cranston, but apt to be a trifle hot and eager. As it was, Tom Barlow's horse cantered deliberately down the field, and his rider was just conscious that Miss Badsworth turned in her saddle to see him come. It was a novel experience, the clever on and off which the old horse, left to himself, adopted; but Jack was not only a rider but a horseman, and as he pulled up nearly beside the young lady

he patted the horse and said laughingly, "Oh, that's how we do it, is it?"

Then he was conscious of a row of pearly teeth, a pleasant smile, and an equally pleasant voice which said:—

"Yes, that is how we do it in these wilds. I daresay you are used to something both different and better!"

"Well, certainly different, and only better because the fences are not so close together," he replied.

"Ah, it's not all like this; up yonder"—pointing with her whip—"it's wild enough."

"Well, it's very delightful, that is all I can say, only it's a trifle too fine and summer-like for much——"

A whistle from the master interrupted him.

"The third whin bush from the top, Lavvy; a little Jack, he'll do."

A touch of the horn brought all his hounds to the master, and he sat and watched his daughter as she cantered across in the direction indicated; a crack of her whip but no other sound came back. She held up her cap and then Charles Badsworth trotted to the spot. One swing, one shrill cry which sounded like a prolonged "Hey!" and the little pack were gone.

It was a merry time for the first ten minutes. There was much dodging about as usual amongst the majority of those present, they knew every yard of the country and were justified in relying on their experience that the hare would come back after describing a circle of greater or less diameter. Charles Badsworth and his daughter were in close attendance, and Jack Morgan, being a stranger and out to enjoy himself, followed suit. The working of the pack delighted while their pace astonished him.

At the end of a quarter of an hour there came a check.

The Squire sat perfectly still watching every movement of his hounds as they made a rapid cast unaided, his keen eyes glanced round for any indication of the lost line. His daughter, a little wide of him, did the same.

Jack Morgan with beaming face gravitated towards her.

"My word, the little Johnnies can go!" he said. "I haven't had better fun this season. It's a bit pewey; I don't seem to have been on terra firma for two minutes at a time."

A pair of merry brown eyes turned momentarily to him (yes, they were brown) and a smile acknowledged the compliment to the pack, then they searched the surroundings again.

"They are good, aren't they?" the girl said. "You seem to be quite at home by this time."

"Oh, I am all right! I believe this old crock is as safe as a church. I'm being what you may call personally conducted."

"It must rather surprise him. Tom Barlow doesn't ride as hard as he did. Jack's got it," she added, pointing to the terrier on the top of a bank. "Jack's a wonder, you know."

"Well done, Jack! He's my namesake; I like to think of the title being upheld."

"Don't make me laugh, I can't whistle," Miss Badsworth said, making a little pause before she signalled to her father.

The Squire touched his horn and once more the trio were set going.

"What a nursery for a huntsman," Jack thought, as difficulty after difficulty was unravelled. Both the Squire and his daughter seemed to be up to every move of the game, and a beaten hare can exercise an ingenuity which is, to say the least, surprising, and this one was no exception. For the best part of an hour the chase went on intermittently, till at last Jack thought it was over. In a grass field rather larger than usual they came to a full stop.

The little pack made its cast unaided, and then the majority stood with heads up and fanning sterns.

"He's down," Miss Badsworth interpreted.

"How do you know?" Jack asked, thinking he should hold them forward.

"Look at Counsellor, Sempstress and Abigail; there now!"

At that moment the redoubtable "Jack," evidently under the impression that somebody must do something, plunged

into a patch of rushes. A stiff hare made but a poor effort, and at the next ditch the end came.

"Perhaps you never had one before," the Squire said, bringing the scut across to Jack; "anyway a Cornish one. Somehow you don't look like a man who despises 'jelly dogs'. The best school for hunting that there is, sir; one learns patience and observation."

"Just what I've been thinking all the morning," Jack replied. "I've learnt a lot."

"Well, it's never too late, is it? Now we'll go down to Padstow's and have a bit of bread and cheese and a glass of cider. It's warm, but this sun will film over later."

And they went, and Jack learnt something of Cornish hospitality.

CHAPTER IV.

"WELL, Mrs. Hogben, and what is the matter? I got your note."

The Squire pulled up at the gate of a cottage garden and addressed a buxom, good-looking woman who was evidently waiting to speak to him.

"Well, Squire, it's like this." She dived into a small shed and produced five headless chickens almost fit for the table. "Now, how'd Miss Lavvy like this?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Hogben," that young lady replied. "Do you shut them up at night?"

"Lor' bless 'ee, yes, miss, but this here were done by day."

"Rats, missis, rats," the Squire said with a twinkle in his eye.

"You knows better than that, Squire; but I saw 'im going off with one with my own eyes."

"I can't help being a poor man, my good woman, otherwise we'd have things different. Well"—putting a half-sovereign into her hand—"we will have a look for him, and bustle him about, too, if we can find him."

He glanced at the gorse-patched hill above him, and rode on with his hounds clustering round his horse before the echo of thanks and "Well, you *be* a gentleman, sure," could reach him.

"Are we going to look for a fox?" Jack asked, riding alongside Miss Badsworth. "They'll bustle him, but I don't suppose they would catch him." The young lady pretended to be offended.

"They might. It wouldn't be the first time," was all she said.

The plan of campaign was slightly altered. The Squire kept his hounds together, cheered them and cracked his whip from time to time as patch after patch of gorse was drawn. Jack the terrier was in his element, neither gorse nor brambles were too thick for him. The little hill was almost circular, and half had been drawn without result; twice on the far side the hounds strung themselves out in a narrow sheep track, each time the Squire pulled up his horse and cheered a hound by name. Presently his keen eyes caught sight of something down below; in a moment his horn went to his lips, and his horse was slipping and slithering down the hill-side. Jack watched the little pack get to him, they wanted no driving on; Miss Lavinia's place was a sinecure. There was no holloaing, "He—e—e—y," was all the Squire said as he plumped his pack down on the line, and they burst into a joyous chorus.

Jack and half a dozen more were close in their wake, for the chances were there would be no ringing now, and yet almost a circle was described whilst their fox tried the various homesteads that had been the scene of his nightly rounds. But he got no peace, the little pack sped along at an incredible pace till nothing was left for their quarry but to set his mask towards a place of safety. Down into a little valley and up the opposite side they raced, the Squire close at their sterns with Miss Lavvy in attendance. Jack watched her as the handy Galloway popped over the low walls and negotiated the stone-faced banks, and thought she would be hard to beat with the Cranston.

At the end of twenty-three minutes there was a slight hesitation at a road; the sky had clouded somewhat, and the air was cooled by the suspicion of a sea-fog high up overhead. With the wild moorland before him the Squire didn't hesitate to hold his hounds forward, and a few seconds put things right.

There was less cultivated land now, and a sharp bend to the right showed moorland—moorland, nothing but moorland. Some rocks cropped up upon the skyline (Jack Morgan

heard afterwards it was a Tor) and a horseman was to be seen riding towards them for all he was worth, his figure silhouetted against the sky. It was a new experience once more for Jack. Now and then a detour had to be made on account of a bog, now the heather was knee-deep, and again a friendly track would lend its valuable aid. Up and up they went for the Tor, and then suddenly the pack turned at right angles and headed for what appeared to be an eternity of heather. Phil Padstow with his knowledge of the fitness of things had ridden hard for that Tor, and cracked his whip to some purpose, but his horse was done with, and he contented himself with riding slowly along and watching the chase from the upper ground. The air was keen up there and whistled merrily in Jack Morgan's ears as he got the best pace he could out of Tom Barlow's nag. If ever he had admired hounds, he did so the more now as they threaded the tracks in the rough ground; not a single hound had tailed off, and the terrier was running well up in front. If the archbishops and bishops of the Church had previously asserted the fact that they could go the pace, Jack would have been a polite dissenter.

Two miles farther on they descended a coombe, and at the bottom the Squire pulled up. "Go on, Lavvy," he shouted, "my horse is lame."

Jack offered to change.

"Not for the world," was the reply. "I won't have you get the chance to despise 'jellies'. Go on."

Jack climbed the opposite steep and followed the girl on the Galloway as fast as his sobbing horse could travel.

Further on still there was the welcome respite of a check on a small piece of cultivated ground, an oasis in the vast of moorland. Out came Miss Lavvy's horn, she cantered forward, one sharp blast, Jack put the hounds to her, and in a twinkling all were going again. Now that fox was fat and the scent on the moor was first class, and if any human being had been there to see, they would have noticed that his back was up and his brush was down; but no one was

there. Why he went up a steep hill-side when he might have travelled on level ground cannot be stated; he did, and when he descended the other side there was nothing left for him but to lie down.

Jack Morgan saw Miss Lavvy jump off and run up the hill beside her blown horse. She went up as those do who are sound at heart and used to a hilly country. She disappeared over the top, and Jack struggled up in her wake. Barely had he reached the summit when a clear "Whoo! Whoop!" which would have done credit to George Carter in his prime, reached him. He looked down upon a pretty sight a hundred yards below. The girl with her cap in one hand and horn in the other stood with the dead fox between her feet and the hounds in front of her, her blown horse with heaving flanks fifty yards away. "Whoo! Whoop!" she cried, and then the clear notes of the horn travelled far on the moorland air.

Two or three hounds bayed, and the terrier, with bristles up, stood close to the carcase of his enemy. Jack Morgan ran down just as Miss Badsworth, with a knife in her hand, was looking hesitatingly at the fine dog-fox, now as stiff as though carved in wood.

"It's a nasty, messy job, and the first whip does it as often as not. I've seen it done scores of times, though I've never done it; let me take the duty off your hands," he said pleasantly behind her.

"I've seen father do it many times, but that's a different thing," she laughed. "I confess I don't hanker after it."

"Well, keep the terrier off my legs, for he looks as if he would resent my interference. We must have the mask for the kennel door, the brush for you (what a lovely white tag), and I must take Tom Barlow a pad."

Jack set about the work artistically; fortunately his knife was sharp, and though the operation took longer than should strictly have been the case, there was no one to laugh when he made a slight mistake with the vertebræ at the base of the skull.

"THE CLEAR NOTES OF THE HORN TRAVELLED FAR ON THE MOORLAND AIR."

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"You, as huntsman, must do the rest," he said. A gleam of sunshine pierced the mist and lit up the dell in which they were standing and fell upon the figure of the girl, and Jack stepped back to admire the picture.

Miss Badsworth took up the mangled remains with both hands, held them on high, and with one more "Whoo! Whoop," threw them to the hounds. Jack, the terrier, appreciated the attention by giving what was left of his enemy a final shake. The worry was not a success.

The girl turned to Jack and said :—

"Whew! I'm not squeamish, but I confess I wish it hadn't to end like that."

"Oh, it's the fortune of war, you know," he said cheerfully. "We had a splendid time; I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it, and Mrs. What'shername back there will be pleased; we'll leave her a pad as a keepsake. Let us wash our hands at the pool yonder."

Jack fetched the horses, and joined Miss Badsworth as she was drying her hands on her pocket-handkerchief. "Now you must tell me your name," she said.

"John, commonly called Jack, Morgan, at your service," he replied, raising his hat.

"Then I assure you I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Morgan."

"Oh, don't mention it. I only regret the Squire wasn't here to see the finish of the fun. How far are we from home?"

"I think we can do it in eight miles."

As a matter of fact Jack was not seriously grieved at the Squire's absence; he anticipated a pleasant ride, and pleasant it was.

Miss Badsworth mounted without assistance, and from a matter of habit ran her eye over the hounds.

"Nine couple and a half, all here, mum," Jack said, touching his hat. "According to Cocker, Miss Badsworth, I suppose I, as acting first whip, should have those couples and that mask."

"Very likely," she replied. "Down here we have frequently to break conventional rules, but if you come to think of it, though the huntsman is absent, I am the first whip. Where do you usually hunt, Mr. Morgan?"

"In Dumpshire, with the Cranston," Jack replied. They were skirting the hill and coming out on the leveller ground beyond. The fog had been dispersed, and the slanting sun lit up the whole landscape. To Jack it was a comparatively trackless waste, but his companion treated it as a familiar spot. Jack watched the effect of his words.

Miss Badsworth checked her horse momentarily as she exclaimed: "The Cranston! Uncle Hugo's pack? Tell me what he is like, Mr. Morgan; I have never seen him."

"I think I have hunted with the Cranston since I was ten," Jack replied. "So Mr. Badsworth is your uncle, is he?" (as if he wasn't well aware of the fact). He is stouter than your father but very like him, rather greyer, perhaps, but with the same voice and manner; he's a great favourite in the country, but so he ought to be, for he does everything at his own expense except a miserably supported poultry fund. You see, people are fond of having things done for them. I suppose I mustn't ask how it is you don't know him?"

"Oh, yes, you may; but I cannot answer the question, for I don't know the reason. I really don't think there is any reason. I have never heard what the hitch was years ago, but if Uncle Hugo is like father he would never take the initiative in bringing about a reconciliation; my private opinion is if they once met they would be inseparable. That is the Badsworth character. Aunt Lavinia is just the same; she is the authority on women's rights and women's freedom. Father makes fun of it when he reads accounts in the paper; does Uncle Hugo do the same?"

Jack Morgan was obliged to look away from the speaker as he replied: he didn't like to say he had heard Hugo Badsworth condemn his sister's views as "the damndest rubbish of modern days," but that was after dinner. "They

appear to be on friendly terms when your aunt comes down about Christmas time," he said.

"And what is Aunt Lavinia like?" the girl asked with the smile that Jack began to think was one of the pleasantest he had ever seen.

"Oh, she——" Jack began. "I hope I shall not offend you—they say she has peculiar views, is a queer woman and all that kind of thing; but I call her a real good sort."

"Then I believe she is," Miss Badsworth said heartily, and Jack asked "Why?"

"Oh, don't ask me 'why?' A woman is not supposed to give her reasons."

"Your aunt does, or thinks she does, but upon my word I don't believe they are her convictions. I often have the honour of piloting her when she comes down; she goes pretty well, you know."

"I see you like her, Mr. Morgan. Views or no views, oblige me by describing her."

"Now, there you have me; I'm no good at description. She's tall, with a good figure, and sits nicely on her horse, but she's—but she's—no more like you than she is like me."

He caught a twinkle in the brown eyes from underneath the peak of the velvet cap.

"Well, that's negative, isn't it? I'm afraid I'm no wiser than I was before. I wonder if I should get on with her."

"Bound to; like a house on fire. You couldn't help it; why *I* can."

Miss Lavvy laughed; she couldn't remember a more pleasant ride home. Perhaps that was why they forgot to trot along when opportunity offered. A male visitor, except an occasional wanderer like Bickersdyke, and he was not at all to Miss Badsworth's taste, was a rare phenomenon.

"I like that terrier, he's a sportsman," Jack said, pointing to the dog trotting along at the head of affairs.

"That is my special property. 'John Knox' is his real title. When a puppy himself he kept all the harrier pups

in order and father called him 'the Reformer'. He is always 'John' at home."

"Just like me again. I always am John when any one takes me seriously, but I'm proud to be his namesake."

"Well, he is certainly there or thereabouts when he's wanted," Miss Badsworth said. "As a matter of fact we shouldn't have killed when we did if he hadn't slipped round that little furze brake and met the fox as he came out. I was just on top of the hill in time to see."

"There is nothing like being the right man in the right place. There is often some degree of luck about it, but I'm all for taking credit when I can get it."

"Here you are, Mrs. Hog—Lord, I've forgotten what," Jack exclaimed when eventually they reached the cottage. "Behold the head of the traitor, and a pad for the fowl-house door. Nothing like plenty of warning to offenders; they don't take it as a rule, but it relieves the mind of the conscientious."

A brief detour had brought them to the cottage gate, and Mrs. Hogben gazed on the grinning mask with satisfaction.

"Serves 'im right," she said. "But, Lor', Miss Lavvy, you must be tired, and where's the Squire?"

"Tired? When did you know me tired? The Squire lamed his horse; it was most unfortunate."

"Well, anyhow, you had this young gent to look after you," Mrs. Hogben said, with a dim vision of possibilities which always delights the female mind.

Miss Badsworth smiled again as she moved on, but Jack was ready:—

"I've just been saying there's nothing like being in the right place at the right time."

"No more there isn't," Mrs. Hogben replied; then dropping her voice, "You couldn't do better, take my word for it."

Jack waved his hand gaily, and trotted on after his companion.

CHAPTER V.

THE Squire's face beamed with genuine pleasure, to say nothing of pride in his daughter, when he cantered up a side lane on a pony just as Miss Badsworth and Jack Morgan reached Rockwell cross roads.

"Well done, Lavvy; I see you killed him," he said, pointing to the fox's mask hanging from the couples. "I made sure he would have done you and got to ground. Where did you catch him?"

"He lay down in a patch of gorse just beyond Copton Hill. Mr. Morgan was there and kindly performed the rites, as you call them. I must introduce you, dad."

"Artistically done, sir," the Squire said laughing, when the formalities had been gone through. "Brought up in the right school, I'm glad to see. Well, how about jelly dogs now?"

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it; in fact, I can hardly realise it now. Just as I was in hopes of a little trouble so as to let the horses catch their wind Miss Badsworth had her hounds on the line in a trice. I was only just up in time to be of use, but then we don't run up the hills in Dumpshire, and it would be hard to say whether I or the horse was most blown."

"Dumpshire! You don't mean to say you come from Dumpshire! I was going to ask you up to Dewthorpe if you would honour us; now, upon my word, I shall insist."

Jack half-heartedly pleaded that his kit was at Tordon. Mr. Badsworth would take no denial.

"Never mind that, we aren't far off in size. The horse shall be seen to, and Jim shall take him along by-and-by,

and Lavvy will run you down with the pony in the morning."

Dewthorpe was an old-fashioned stone-built house like many of its neighbours in the district, but there was comfort within, and there were charms without, which might very well have been absent in a more modern residence.

As they rode up Jack Morgan had a vision of gables, ivy and creeper-covered walls, a picturesque garden, a farmyard and buildings at the back, stabling, kennels of a primitive nature according to modern ideas, but warm, well drained and ventilated, and a general absence of paint.

There was a delightful, haphazard appearance about these things, as if they had been plumped down as occasion offered, or circumstances required. It was Charles Badsworth's way of doing things, and these were the outcome of fourteen years' residence and a limited purse.

Within doors things were different. If the carpets were somewhat worn an air of comfort reigned everywhere, the furniture if solid was tastefully arranged, and the old oak and mahogany shone as it only can under the careful and energetic hand. There were arm-chairs which seemed to say "Sit down and take your ease"; flowers in the hall, flowers on the dining-room table, flowers in the drawing-room, and it was plain that some one had arranged them with appreciative hands.

Jack Morgan doubted if the nectar of the gods was superior to the cider administered to him by the Squire from a brown stoneware jug with a silver rim.

"We are early folk, primitive you'll probably think; we dine at seven," Mr. Badsworth said. "I must just look round; will you come?"

Miss Badsworth having disappeared, Jack readily consented, and in three-quarters of an hour he came to the conclusion that method and management were as good, and founded on personal knowledge and personal supervision, at Dewthorpe as at Cranston, though the accessories were as wide apart as the very poles. Hounds were fed, one or two

privileged members of the pack making their way subsequently to the house, the dressing of the horses inspected, the damage to the Squire's mount duly discussed, a few choice Devon and Alderney cows shown, orders for various matters on the morrow given, until "Now, I think it's all done, let us get ready for dinner or we shall get into trouble," led to a brisk walk to the house.

As Jack made his preparations, such as they were, he found himself wondering what manner of young lady Miss Badsworth might be. Was she horsey as well as sporting? No mother, a thorough sportsman for a father, it was more than likely, and yet keen as she had shown herself there was something in her manner which gave the impression that she might be a girl of "times and seasons". There were young ladies in the region of Dumpshire who were wont to recapitulate the "jumps they had taken," and the wondrous feats they had performed, as is the custom with those who are of timid disposition, and magnify the imaginary peril when subsequent safety is attained. With such Jack had no sympathy. "Anyway," he thought, "if Miss Badsworth fights again the battles of to-day we shall have an all-night sitting."

It was only as the dinner bell rang that Lavvy appeared, and so great yet so simple was the change that Jack felt doubtful whether this could be the same girl he had seen with her cap in her hand and her horn to her mouth that same afternoon miles away upon the moor.

The bright brown curly hair and the merry brown eyes were the same, but the sedate though easy manner seemed to belong to somebody else. She had been the first whip during the day, but now she was the mistress of her father's house, and right well she carried out the part. She entered the room in a quick energetic style, but the skirt of her dress trailed behind her as it only can do in the case of a woman who can walk. John Knox, who followed her closely, trod upon it twice.

A black satin blouse slashed with rose colour and wond-

rously bedecked with a multitude of narrow pleats is a strong contrast to a weather-worn green jacket, and a black satin skirt, well cut and fitted, wipes out the very existence of its grey fellow scarred with more than one effort of the darner's skill; but after all it matters little if the wearer be the same, either will do on occasion. Such might have been the sum total of Jack Morgan's thoughts had he had time to unravel them from a tangle of surprise; but there was no time, for the Squire said :—

"Come along, then" (apparently referring to the dinner bell); "take Lavvy, Mr. Morgan."

And so, in the cosy dining-room with its oak furniture, its simply arranged table, its sporting prints, and the portrait of the Squire's dead wife looking down with a sweet smile from its place of honour over the fireplace, the three sat down, and the Fates, busy with woof and web, wove on as though but a few hours before they had not severed the thread of a fourth and changed the pattern of their work. As he spread his napkin Jack Morgan looked up at the portrait of the Squire's dead wife, and then involuntarily glanced at Miss Badsworth before he raised his eyes to the picture again. The face was older, but the resemblance to the daughter was remarkable.

"You see it, Mr. Morgan, everybody does," the Squire said in a voice in which pride and regret jostled one another. "Like in more ways than one," he added.

Miss Badsworth coloured ever so slightly; she kissed her hand to her father, and said :—

"Dad wants something, I suppose; I wonder what it is."

"Well, if you must know, child, I want to hear all about Dumpshire, and Cranston in particular. You don't come in at all."

He glanced at the portrait, nevertheless, ere he turned to Jack, and prepared to assist his narration by numerous questions.

"Fancy your knowing Hugo as well as that," he said when the parlour-maid had finally left the room. "It's an

odd thing to say of one's own brother that you have the advantage of me, Mr. Morgan, but so it is, and the curious part of the whole business is there was no earthly reason but family obstinacy for the existence of the state of things; we differed, and then in time we thought we had quarrelled, and neither one nor the other would hold out the olive branch. I've been urged to do it over and over again" (with an upward look at the portrait), "and Lavvy has said the same thing, but you see I'm the younger and the poorer, and it would look so deuced like wanting to curry favour, wouldn't it? Not that I want anything; but Hugo wouldn't know that, and——" he broke off, looked at Jack and drummed on the table with his fingers.

"What would you think, sir, if places were changed?" Jack asked, encouraged by a grateful look from the girl at the head of the table.

"I? I'd shake him by both hands," was the reply.

"And I'm much mistaken if the Squire of Cranston wouldn't do just the same," Jack said. "I know him as well as most people, am his nearest neighbour, and dine with him on the average three days a fortnight."

"But how about Lavinia? I see in the papers she's great on encouraging the 'discontentment of women' or some such thing—clothes, social status. We've got a female guardian here full of fads and impossible methods of dealing with public money; we are always an hour longer at a Board meeting than we used to be. If any one differs from her she writes letters demanding apologies, and it takes the chairman all his time to keep her on the line. We shall never break her from riot till we couple her up to a gate-post and dress her down."

"Dad!"

"My dear, it's perfectly true, until she is coupled up in holy matrimony she'll never be to be depended on; and I daresay your aunt is just the same."

"You haven't let Mr. Morgan tell you; he has told me."

The Squire looked at Jack, and Jack tried to recollect what

he had said upon the moor. The concluding part which summed up his convictions was all that recurred to him.

"I call her a real good sort—at heart," he said.

"Capital! Well, I'll—yes, hanged if I don't. I'll write to Hugo to-morrow."

To-morrow! How we close our eyes and charge that fence simply because we have been too proud or too lazy or too something to open the hand-gate of to-day. And then, sometimes, what a fall we get which knocks us out of time for a bit, and conjures up regrets for things which because we can now see them in the past, we blame ourselves for not having perceived when in the future.

At that moment the wires had already told their tale, and there was set up in type a paragraph for the morning papers headed "Fatal Accident to an M.F.H.". The items as contained in that paragraph were, as usual, incorrect in detail. The principal fact was too true; what happened was this:—

It was quite as warm a day in Dumpshire as in Cornwall, and members of the hunt who came to see the last of the season were influenced by that slackness which besets all but the keenest when scent is bad and the primroses in full bloom. The master, hunting his own hounds, was one of the few not influenced by the surroundings. Twice hounds were stopped with a vixen before them, till Apperley Wood, three miles from Cranston, furnished a dog-fox.

Probably with a knowledge that scent was bad, that fox refused to leave the covert except for one brief excursion; some said he was mangy, others declared it was only a mark on his back. The Squire was determined not to leave a doubtful animal with the chance of spreading disease.

For two hours all was done that patience, perseverance and energy could do.

Mr. Hugo Badsworth sent his first horse home, and set about a final effort upon a second; it was so successful that a beaten fox had to save his life by attempting the open; but heart and strength failed him, he got back to the covert

with hounds close at his brush, slipped through a corner of the wood and threaded a hedgerow on one side of a narrow field with hounds on either hand. A low hedge on the opposite side of the field alone separated the master from his pack when a growling mass proclaimed the end; with his eye upon them Mr. Badsworth turned his horse short at the insignificant obstacle. What happened was never clearly known, the horse fell, threw his rider, and in his effort to rise struck the Squire on the head with a hind foot just as he was picking himself up. He never regained consciousness, and an hour after they bore him in solemn procession to Cranston he was dead.

CHAPTER VI.

A SOFT westerly wind from the distant sea shimmering in a narrow glittering line under the morning sun welcomed Jack Morgan as he stood outside the garden door at Dewthorpe. Below him the garden itself sloped towards the meadows where the Alderneys were busy feeding with many snorts and puffs after the manner of cattle which have just been emancipated from the cowsheds.

A subtle scent of wallflowers pervaded the air, and every now and then a shower of petals from the plum trees powdered the lap of spring with a mock snowstorm. Jack strolled idly along a pathway bordered with clumps of showy tulips and bright with the varying greens of delphiniums and lilies rapidly maturing the spikes which would anon burst into a blaze of colour; he felt singularly contented, though the spirit of discontent was foreign to him. As he passed through a door in a grey stone wall a rattle of tin vessels and the swish of a broom upon a wet floor arrested his attention.

"The dairy, undoubtedly," he said to himself, and then he quickened his step, for seated outside, with the air of one who waits in patience but with certainty of purpose, was John Knox. Either observation or instinct convinced Mr. Morgan that John Knox (whom he had observed was styled "Johnnie" on the domestic hearth) meant Miss Badsworth.

And so it was. Within the dairy, clad in a dainty lavender cotton frock, over which was a white bib apron, with sleeves rolled to the elbow, displaying well-shaped, snowy arms, a tweed cap upon her head, Miss Lavvy was busy with a pile

of mysterious discs, whilst a stout country girl washed down the red-brick floor.

"Good morning, Miss Badsworth," Jack exclaimed, after one glance of unfeigned admiration at the picture presented. "I had no intention of intrusion, but—may I come in?"

"Oh! good morning, Mr. Morgan, by all means come in. I am rather proud of my domain."

"Will you kindly intimate the same to your guardian angel, 'the Reformer'. There is a sort of flaming-sword arrangement in his manner, though he says nothing," Jack replied.

"Johnnie is quite aware you have permission," the girl said with a smile, "don't be afraid."

"I'm not exactly afraid"—stooping to pat the terrier, who stood wagging his tail and looking up at Jack—"but it is too late to take precautions when one has a piece taken out of the calf of one's leg."

"I shall have finished in a few minutes; I must just complete the separator and then the work will be done."

Jack glanced at the display of butter, placed in rich yellow rolls upon slate slabs, the pans of milk, the churns and various appliances arranged with methodical neatness.

"My word, Miss Badsworth, you must be up early of a morning!" he said.

"Oh, it doesn't do to lie in bed in the country; we should never get through the day's work," was the cheerful reply.

Then it was quite natural that Jack should require a full explanation of the mechanism of the separator; he had one at home and was perfectly conversant with all its component parts, but, of course, "men are deceivers ever". It was pleasant to watch the lissom white fingers as they rearranged the discs, to admire the rounded arms, and every now and then note the flicker in the brown eyes as their owner explained some intricacy which Jack's feigned obtuseness would not take in.

"Dad will be wanting his breakfast," Miss Badsworth said presently, glancing at the clock which ticked busily overhead.

"And so shall I," Jack replied, "this fresh air and the pursuit of science is very appetising."

There was no apparent hurry, at least the two walked slowly towards the house.

At the above-mentioned door in the stone wall Miss Badsworth stopped.

"I must thank you, Mr. Morgan, for what you said to dad last night. I feel sure he has made up his mind," she said with a pretty upturned look which set Jack's heart skipping like a young unicorn, or whatever a suitably active young animal may be. "I am quite content with my life here with him, for I have never been used to anything else, but I am sure he feels that the family estrangement is absurd."

"Don't mention it; I only stated the facts. Do you think he will write?"

"I feel sure of it; when dad makes up his mind he always acts on his decision."

"Don't you?" was Jack's somewhat irrelevant question.

"I don't know; I think I do."

"And I am sure of it," Jack said with hearty confidence as they walked on this time more briskly. A slight tinge of colour mounted to Miss Badsworth's face. "He is a *nice* man," she thought.

Jack saw it out of the corner of his eye, but he looked away over the landscape with a smile on his face, and somehow the conversation ceased.

"Is that where we had our jolly gallop yesterday?" he asked, pointing away to the red brown of distant moorland on the horizon.

Miss Badsworth coloured again, for her thoughts had travelled away upon the same course.

"You know it is not," she said with a laugh. "It was in exactly the opposite direction."

"Bless me! Was it? My bump of locality seems to have gone wrong amongst these hills and moors. However, I know where Dewthorpe is, I'm thankful to say."

"Come on, come on, it's breakfast time; I've written that letter, Lavvy!" the Squire's voice broke in.

Miss Badsworth looked at her companion and nodded, as much as to say "I told you so".

"Good business!" was implied in Jack's nod in reply.

It was easy to gather from Charles Badsworth's cheery manner at the breakfast table that a weight was taken off his mind; he had not yet arrived at that state in which one awaits a reply to an important question. At present he had held out the olive branch and with that he was content. He knew all the ins and outs of the country for miles round, and soon gave Jack to understand that his aunt's doubts upon the subject of the probity of her tenants was unfounded.

Jack Morgan came to the conclusion that the road to Tordon was too short and the pony too fast ere he reached the Duchy Arms. With profound regret he bade his fair companion farewell.

"Don't forget you promised father to come again," she said gaily. Jack watched her as she drove away, the sun shining on her curly hair where it stole from beneath the brim of her sailor hat. He watched till at the curve of the street she turned and waved her hand.

"This come for you, sir, first thing when the office opened," Tom Barlow's voice said behind him, and Jack turned to see the orange cover of a telegram. It was from his manservant.

"The Squire was killed by a fall this afternoon. Jackson."

For a moment Jack was paralysed by the news, then he astonished Tom Barlow by running up the street as if for his life.

There was another curve in the road. Miss Badsworth was out of sight, so he walked slowly back trying to collect his thoughts.

Tom Barlow saw him turn once more, and walk briskly away.

How short had been the drive—how long the walk to Dewthorpe seemed to be!

Jack Morgan revolved many methods of breaking the news, but as he ascended the hill which was in full view of the house, he caught sight of the lavender frock on the very path which he had trodden that morning, and withal it was beside a man whose figure did not coincide with that of the Squire. The wearer of the lavender frock evidently saw him for she left her companion and came to the garden gate.

"What, back again already? Have you forgotten something?" she cried with a sunny smile which suddenly faded as she recognised anxiety upon Jack's face.

He wiped his forehead and asked:—

"Is the Squire in?"

"He took the pony when I got back; I fear he won't be here for an hour or more," she replied. "Is there something the matter? I see there is; tell me."

Jack looked at the anxious eyes, and he came to the conclusion that they were set in a sensible, reliable face belonging to a person who would neither faint nor make an unnecessary fuss. All his plans were upset; he produced the telegram and handed it to Miss Badsworth with the simple explanation, "It is from my manservant".

Miss Badsworth read the telegram twice, and Jack Morgan with his hat in his hand, and the cool sea-breeze fanning his brow, stood and watched the subtle changes on her face.

Several moments passed in silence, the brown eyes were fixed upon the ground, only a flicker of the eyelids gave any clue to what was passing within. Presently they were raised, and Jack saw that they were moist, and he began to get even more uncomfortable than he had been before.

"Poor dad," she said. "He was so proud of that letter, and of having sent it to early post!"

It was her father she thought of, his disappointment, the disappointment at making an effort which should have been made years before, and then being too late. The uncle whose career had been cut short so suddenly was nothing to her, an unknown quantity in her life, she was sorry as kind-hearted people are sorry, but that was all.

"It's curious, is it not?" Jack said vaguely. "I hardly know what to do. I believe I am one of the executors. Mr. Hugo Badsworth once told me so."

"You must go, of course," she said.

"Yes, but you—I should have liked to save you the pain; it's awful breaking bad news."

"Now, that's nice of you; I know you would; but don't trouble about me. Dad and I have lived long enough together to know one another. I am so sorry there is nothing in the stable to take you back, but you will catch the express. Do you know, I pity you most."

"Good gracious! Why?"

"Because I know you have lost a good friend."

"But I think I have found two more," Jack said, as he held out his hand.

There was a little pause before those hands parted (the man on the footpath above thought it was a long one). Curiously neither of the two said a word.

Miss Badsworth turned once or twice to look at John Morgan's retreating figure as he rapidly descended the hill. She would have preferred to enter the house direct, but she could not do so because Victor Bickersdyke barred the way.

"Who's that, Lavvy?" he asked.

"A friend of mine," she answered shortly.

"I know the chap; met him at the Duchy Arms two nights ago; drinks, I think."

"Well, he wouldn't be the only one if he did."

"There you go, down on me as usual; any way you seemed to have an interesting confab. Tell me what it was about."

"I shall not tell you anything I don't choose."

"I daresay not; perhaps you can be as obstinate as the rest of the Badsworths."

The reproach came home to the girl in a manner the speaker never dreamt of; a change came over her, and her voice sank as she said:—

"Victor, I suppose I ought to tell you if you don't know it—Uncle Hugo is dead!"

"Great Scott, you don't say so! How do you know?"

For answer she handed him the telegram. He threw his cap into the air when he read it.

"There's a chance for some of us now."

"Victor, you are a brute," Lavvy said viciously. "If uncle ignored us during his life, why should he make any difference at his death?"

"Oh, they often do; make a sort of bargain with the Almighty; what they have isn't theirs, but that is no matter, they treat it as if it were. Give me a drink, just for luck."

Miss Badsworth looked disgustedly at him.

"Not a drop. I'm going indoors."

"Not for a minute, Lavvy. This might make all the difference; you and I could club up together. I've often thought of it."

"Then don't think of it any more, let me go!" as he took her arm to detain her.

"We used to be very good pals, Lavvy!"

"Perhaps we were, but that was long ago."

"What's the odds; we should get on first rate if Uncle Hugo has left us the needful. You'll marry me, won't you?"

Miss Badsworth's eyes flashed and she set her teeth. "Never!" she said, jerking her sleeve from his grasp. "For all the gold of Ophir I wouldn't marry a drunkard—there!"

"But I'll——"

"Don't add another to the list," she interrupted. "You've promised dad dozens of times. A man who hasn't the moral strength to keep one promise will not keep another."

She turned to enter the house.

"Did you talk to that other chap like that?" he asked. "I'll warrant you didn't; we shall see."

She tossed her head as she ran up the two steps, angry with herself because her face turned crimson.

CHAPTER VII.

"My dear Miss Badsworth, I have no doubt in my mind that this is a step which we, in the position we occupy, are bound to take; it is part and parcel, I may say the very essence, of the attitude which we have taken up in the world. We must take the lead; women have been followers long enough."

The speaker, Mrs. Dickinson, a woman of austere appearance, had forgotten that she was paying a private visit, and had broken out into a phase of platform oratory upon which she prided herself. "I am not quite sure," uttered meditatively by Miss Badsworth, had drawn forth the winged words. Miss Badsworth was an ally, but Miss Badsworth was, in Mrs. Dickinson's heart, a rival at the shrine of popularity. There was something persuasive in the tone of her voice which Mrs. Dickinson's lacked, and moreover Miss Badsworth was a lady who lived in Portman Square, and in consequence had adherents of some weight; not that that mattered in the joint cause—at least it ought not to have mattered.

The subject in hand was the Humanitarian Society, and Mrs. Dickinson had set down the axiom that a Woman's Branch was a necessity; that if the matter were considered at all the hand of Woman should be upon the helm, not merely engaged in trimming the sails.

"Surely, Miss Badsworth, cruelty in any form must be stamped out;" a hand was laid upon the table with considerable force. "There must be a clean sweep of all those things which savour of oppression if the world is to feel that Woman has earned emancipation, even if it is temporarily, and as we think unjustly, withheld from her as a right."

Miss Badsworth glanced round at the heaped-up papers on the table, and from them her eyes roved to pigeon-holes filled with neatly docketed bundles of documents.

"Our hands are full," she said, as if thinking aloud. "That Society for taking over the Responsibility of Parents requires all our energies if it is to be successful. Already there are ten sets of parents ready to hand over the upbringing of their offspring—for a consideration—(they are not very desirable people, but we must begin somewhere), there may be a hundred to-morrow, and we are not very well prepared; it is difficult to foresee the complications which arise in each case. Don't you think if these children are brought up and educated to abhor the various items which the Humanitarian Society seeks to abolish, it would be better than stirring up a crusade of opposition?"

"My dear Miss Badsworth, you surprise me! Is all this cruelty and suffering to go on for a generation without our protest? Are men, and I regret to say women on occasion, to go on unchecked? Take the case of the thousands of birds—pheasants, partridges and grouse—which are annually fattened for the gratification of the blood-thirstiness of so-called sportsmen; think of the amount of suffering inflicted, think——"

"I don't fancy partridges to any extent, and certainly grouse are fattened for slaughter; the pheasants perhaps are so, but——"

Mrs. Dickinson in her turn interrupted.

"There surely can be no 'buts'. Take the case of poor hunted animals; think of the horror when men and dogs with savage cries are terrifying the life out of them; think of the agony when cruel fangs 'break up,' as it is, I believe, called, the quivering carcase, and men, human beings, gloat in the gore with which the dumb creation is encouraged—'blooded,' I think they called it. How can you smile?"

"I beg your pardon," Miss Badsworth said, composing her face, upon which had inadvertently appeared traces of amusement. "It's as well not to overdo the horrors; I am

under the impression that the sporting terms you have used, 'breaking up the carcase' and 'blooding the hounds,' are ceremonies which take place after death, and consequently cause no suffering, but are a part of what we should call, in worthier objects, education."

Mrs. Dickinson, who had, as she thought, coached up her subject under one of the officers of the Humanitarian Society, a person who had never seen a hound in his life, looked at Miss Badsworth with some astonishment. It was a subject she had expected to have had all to herself, and now she found her would-be ally knew as much or more than she did.

Lavinia Badsworth had seen a rapidly passing vision of her brother Hugo working out the cunning devices of a beaten fox; and there occurred to her many excuses of the good man which she had listened to when night had fallen for having lost him here, there, or somewhere else. There was an impression left on her mind of exhilarating times when hounds were running merrily over the grass, when the fresh air whistled, and the fences were easy. There might be jealousies, there might be heart-burnings, there might even be words when only one practical place in a fence presented itself and late comers or timid riders caused obstruction; but barbarity was absent, and a sportsmanlike element of fairplay was predominant, except, perhaps, when the master in his eagerness had his hounds just a trifle too near the spot from whence a fox was being ejected.

Miss Badsworth was ready to arouse in her sisters the spirit of independence, but in no way did she imagine that the cause could be furthered by unnecessary interference with men. In her heart she could not subscribe to Mrs. Dickinson's opinions, but she had a way of temporising, and this had on more occasions than one let her in for work with which she had little sympathy, and concerning which she foresaw insuperable difficulties. She looked at her guest, at her hair twisted up unequally on either side of her head, at her divided skirt pitchforked on anyhow, and her jacket which

wrinkled across the shoulders; for some reason she thought of Peter Dickinson, an insignificant, silent little man, who quietly went about his work in the city, and from force of habit turned a deaf ear to his wife's philippics.

"I can't help thinking we had better leave the men alone," she said at length. "Better do one or two things well; the thin end of the wedge can do much, Mrs. Dickinson."

"And what is the good of it unless you have the crowbar ready when the time for leverage comes?" that lady said with conviction.

"I'm afraid my mechanics are weak, I'll ring for tea." Miss Badsworth rose and walked across the room. She was a contrast to her visitor, tall and elegant, with well-made clothes.

"You will allow your name to be on the committee," Mrs. Dickinson said with a sort of clutch that a person might make upon the smooth slates of a slanting roof. "We look upon you, Miss Badsworth, as *one* of our most influential leaders; your name would be carefully searched for, and I am sure you would never imperil a good work by standing aloof."

Everybody has their weak point, and flattery told upon Miss Badsworth. Mrs. Dickinson must have been aware of it, for it always cost her much to bear testimony to another's worth.

Miss Badsworth rang the bell and stood for a moment watching some pigeons in the square without. Mrs. Dickinson followed her gaze and took up her parable.

"Look at that, there is an instance; think of those innocent birds being immured by hundreds, and then liberated at Hurlingham or the Gun Club, or somewhere that men may gamble on the chances of their life and death. What can you think of that, Miss Badsworth?"

"I don't think I would work that in, if I were you, my dear" (there was a little stiffness in the term of endearment). "There is a Providence, or chance, or whatever you like to call it, in the lives of most things. There are, judg-

ing by all the public buildings in London, some bad shots as well as good who go pigeon shooting."

"I don't follow you."

"No? Well, you see, a number of those birds, apart from their descendants, have found a refuge and sedulous care such as they never had before; they escaped, and good came out of evil. Will you take sugar in your tea?"

"None, thank you. I never allow myself luxuries," Mrs. Dickinson replied acidly, and for some while silence reigned.

Miss Badsworth was anxious to get rid of her visitor; she had a report on the Society for the Abolition of Art Needlework, and the substitution of Scholarships in Persian History. She had been let in for it by Lady Theodosia Booker, the great antiquary, who, having devised the plan according to her own fads, was clever enough to shelve the work upon some one else. The recollection of this suddenly made Miss Badsworth more cautious. A dinner under the presidency of Sir Cotton Woole on behalf of the Society for Tracing the Ancestry of Waifs and Strays and a conversazione were also down for the evening.

"I'm disappointed at your lukewarmness, my dear Miss Badsworth," Mrs. Dickinson said with a sigh as she sipped her tea and eat her muffin with good appetite, and a mouth apparently constituted for the purpose. "I counted upon you; in fact I asserted at the preliminary meeting with the utmost confidence that you would certainly make one of our number."

"I am sorry if I appear to hang back, but the truth is I have as much or more than I can possibly do; I am daily considering the necessity of employing a private secretary if I could find the right person," Miss Lavinia said.

"I imagine I could easily find that for you."

Mrs. Dickinson was thinking of an impecunious sister who might be coached up in the work.

"I have not decided. It is often more trouble than enough to look after a secretary. Anyway, I think I should prefer to choose for myself."

"Of course, of course, naturally; however, in that case, you would join us, would you not?"

"I really must take time to consider the matter."

Miss Badsworth rose with the idea of moving her visitor.

The ruse was successful, but there were many last words, and eventually Mrs. Dickinson left under the impression that she had prevailed so far that, when Miss Badsworth came to think things over, she would not desert the cause.

There was a peacefulness in the room when Mrs. Dickinson had bustled forth, and Miss Badsworth seated herself in an arm-chair and allowed herself the luxury of ten minutes' rest. She made no attempt to concentrate her thoughts upon anything in particular, they wandered about at their own sweet will.

No doubt the remarks which Mrs. Dickinson had let fall dug out a channel into which those thoughts eventually trickled. Hugo Badsworth seemed to stand upon the hearth-rug with his eyes taking in the various objects in the room as he gave his opinions upon his sister's fads; she recollected what he had said upon the manufacture of work, and was fain to confess unwillingly that there was some truth in his words. Then she tried to trace out Lady Theodosia Booker's method of making other people do her work, but things became dim and visionary—in fact, she was very tired. The hum of varying sounds in the square was soothing, even "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," rendered upon a piano organ with a whirlwind of accompaniment which smothered the original theme, failed to be irritating. Nature, the practical, seized the opportunity for recuperation; she wisely laid up her store against the winter of discontent. Half an hour had elapsed when the opening door aroused Miss Badsworth with a start. The butler, with the dignity of a messenger from cloud-compelling Jove, walked deliberately, with noiseless footfall, to his mistress and extended a silver salver, upon which rested the unmistakable envelope of a telegram. Miss Badsworth took it mechanically (their frequency had long since depleted such missives

of their qualities of joy or terror), and the servant withdrew to the door and stood at attention. He saw his mistress sit suddenly erect in her chair, whilst her face became as pale as death.

"Something wrong," he said to himself, and waited.

A minute elapsed, during which Miss Badsworth twice gazed round the room with unseeing eyes.

"No—answer," she said at length in a hard dry voice which surprised herself.

"Nothing wrong, mum, I hope," the butler said, his curiosity taking courage from the fact that he was an old servant.

"Mr.—Badsworth—is—dead—Roberts."

"Well, to be sure, mum, and he that hearty but a short while ago."

"An accident."

Roberts closed the door softly and hurried down to give the important news below.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Now, why on earth couldn't she say *what* the trouble is?" Charles Badsworth inquired of his daughter, as with a letter beside his plate he gave his mind to fortifying himself against eventualities by means of a good breakfast. "Your aunt is clear enough up to a certain point, begins by holding out the hand of reconciliation which I'm ready enough to take (my unfortunate letter to Hugo will show that), and then whilst she says everything is in order on the one hand, on the other she states that a most extraordinary codicil to your uncle's Will presents insuperable difficulties, and never drops a hint as to its provisions."

"I daresay poor Aunt Lavinia is very much upset; it's only reasonable, dad."

"Oh, I daresay; but when you have to deal with a woman who is by way of taking the lead (at least so the papers say) it seems a pity she cannot put her theories into practice."

"Well, don't go up full of prejudices, dad."

"Prejudices! I don't deal much in that sort of thing."

"I know you don't as a rule, you dear; but there *are* such things in the Badsworth family!"

"I wish I were going to take you with me, child."

"I must look after the business, you know," the girl said smiling; but for all that she would have liked to have been included in the expedition, though it was a sad one.

"I suppose Victor will go up by the same train," she added presently.

"I hope to goodness he'll be sober," the Squire said shortly, and Miss Lavvy hoped so too, but wisely held her peace.

There was no lack of information at Tordon; it was well known at the Duchy Arms that the Squire's brother was dead.

Mr. Victor Bickersdyke had been nothing loath to discuss the family affairs the previous evening, and Charles Badsworth's prospects had waned and his own waxed rosy according to the amount of alcohol taken into his system.

"Well, don't you go missin' the up train!" Tom Barlow had said in a fatherly tone as he had assisted his guest to reach the street.

"I shall ri—trush me," had been the reply.

"If that there fine property goes to a sot like that it's a cryin' shame, though I'm a publican who says it," was Tom's comment as he watched his wife and daughter tidy up the bar.

. . . . . .

It was over. Hugh Badsworth had been laid to rest in the picturesque little churchyard at Cranston; the last of the many carriages which had attended to show the respect of their owners had been driven away; a disjointed procession headed by figures in black, followed at a wide interval by the hunt servants in their red coats, spotless white breeches and shining boots, was wending its way by a broad footpath (which the late Squire had trodden with the regularity of one who sets an example) towards Cranston Lodge.

One red coat remained beside the grave, its wearer engaged in reminiscent conversation with the clerically attired sexton.

The kennel huntsman was a short, solemn-looking man of about sixty, with a weather-beaten face, quick, penetrating eyes and sandy hair, which yielded its light tan (as its owner would have called it) to the inevitable grey only by compulsion and a share and share alike method.

"We shan't see his like again in this country," he said prophetically, looking down and reading for the twentieth time the inscription on the brass plate.

"The other gentleman, the Squire's brother, favoured him much, he quite give me a turn when I see him first; most

like the Squire attending his own burial," the sexton remarked, though it was by no means a part of his duty to reduce the quality of orthodox gloomy impressions.

"Like! He may be like to look at, but that's nothin'; you may have a couple of hounds as like as peas, one as good as they make 'em and the other only fit for the halter."

"To breed from, I suppose you mean, Mr. Summers?" the sexton inquired, tracing, as he thought, an ecclesiastical meaning in the remark.

"Breed from? No, to hang is what I meant."

"Well, yes, we have known humans like that. I can mind Tom and Jim Crosley who——"

"So can I, Mr. Davis, I was here afore you."

The sexton was silent as those are who feel they are in the presence of superior intellects, or being of peaceful disposition avoid controversial subjects.

"What's this they are saying about the hounds?" he asked, by way of introducing a congenial matter.

"Depends what they are sayin'," Mr. Summers said enigmatically.

"Well, they do say that Miss——"

Joe Summers turned upon the sexton so shortly that the latter broke off, and busied himself in placing on one side a wreath of flowers; he positively felt the old huntsman's eyes, as many a fox had done before, nevertheless he read the card attached to the tastefully arranged wreath of Cornish flowers with its simple inscription, "From Lavvy," ere he said:—

"No offence, Mr. Summers."

"None taken; good day, Mr. Davis."

One more look into the grave, one glance at the clear blue sky with moistened eyes, and the old man walked slowly away with a painful limp.

"To think of his bein' took afore me! I'm glad the sun's a shinin'. It don't matter to-day," he said to himself as he went.

. . . . . .

"Would you like all concerned to be present?" Mr. Bailey, the family solicitor, asked deferentially of Miss Badsworth.

"Certainly," was the reply, though there was for the moment the look of a person who is cornered upon the lady's face; the expression changed as Miss Badsworth metaphorically put her back to the wall. "Certainly, by all means," she repeated.

And so it came about that there assembled in the dining-room of Cranston a goodly array of domestics and retainers; they were reverently drawn up at one end of the room.

The authorities had held a brief committee meeting outside as to the method of procedure. Mr. Joseph Summers had laid it down that it would not do to hunt with a mixed pack on so solemn an occasion; that the dog pack should be on one side, and the—— Here the housekeeper had broken in with "Hush, Mr. Summers; I think you are right, notwithstanding," and had passed majestically into the room, followed by the maid-servants, as one who knows her place.

The members of the family, Charles and Lavinia Badsworth and Victor Bickersdyke, filed slowly in, followed by the lawyer and Mr. John Morgan, the sole surviving executor.

"Pray be seated," Mr. Bailey said nervously, spreading some papers on the table and taking a chair. He cleared his throat, and there was a shuffle of feet as those at the far end obeyed orders as well as they could with two chairs short.

The family portraits gazed down from the wall as though they would say "we have no interest in these proceedings," all except the picture of the late Squire of Cranston himself, presented to him after a twenty-five years' mastership. There was a twinkle in his eye which Victor Bickersdyke, who would have given much for a whisky and soda, took as personal, and looked away.

"The last Will and Testament of Hugo Badsworth of Cranston Lodge, in the county of Dumpshire," read Mr. Bailey rapidly, and then proceeded to confuse his hearers

with the various bequests. "£10,000 to my brother, Charles Badsworth, £3,000 to my nephew, Victor Bickersdyke," and so on through a long list of retainers and domestics, according to length of service.

Mr. Bailey made a pause before he said :—

"A clause follows here which makes provision for keeping up the hounds; the Will is dated 25th June, three years ago, but unfortunately (I speak of course my own opinion only) the late Mr. Badsworth added a codicil on 13th February of this year which alters matters materially.

"Miss Lavinia Badsworth, according to the original document, is the residuary legatee; hounds, horses, pictures, plate, furniture, and, in fact, the whole estate is bequeathed to her."

Mr. Bailey took off his spectacles, wiped them, replaced them on his nose, and looked helplessly round as if he had been on the scaffold and was listening for the hoof strokes of the galloping horse conveying his reprieve. All eyes were fixed upon the ground save those of Victor Bickersdyke, and they afforded the man of law neither comfort nor support.

"This codicil, which I will now read to you, is duly executed, and dated 13th February, 190—; and I may state that on 11th February Mr. Badsworth called upon me at my office in London, and appeared to be in perfect health both in body and mind; I just mention the fact, as the codicil is peculiar.

"'I, Hugo Badsworth, of Cranston Lodge in the county of Dumpshire, do declare this to be a codicil of my Will, dated 25th June, 18—. I hereby cancel everything relating to the provision for maintenance of hounds, horses, servants and all matters concerning the upkeeping of the Cranston Hunt as mentioned in my Will of 25th June, 18—.

"'I will and bequeath the hounds and horses, together with the residue of my estate, as set forth in the above-mentioned Will, to my sister Lavinia Badsworth for her sole use, and to be at her disposal, provided :—

"'*First.*—That the estate and farm be kept up and per-

sonally administered by her for one year subsequent to my decease.

"'*Second.*—That the hounds, horses and establishment for hunting the Cranston country two days a week shall be personally kept up and managed by the before-mentioned Lavinia Badsworth for one complete season subsequent to my decease.

"'*Third.*—That for two days a week for one calendar month, *viz.*, the month of November next occurring after my decease, Lavinia Badsworth shall hunt the Cranston Hounds.

"'Failing the carrying out of these terms (except in the case of illness), I bequeath to my sister Lavinia Badsworth the sum of £10,000, and the residue of my estate in all and every particular to my nephew Victor Bickersdyke. Signed by the said, etc.'"

"If that doesn't get her out of her fads, I don't know what will," Hugh Badsworth had said to himself, but of course the remark was not contained in the codicil in so many words.

It is only fair to say that the majority of those below the salt, so to speak, failed to grasp the meaning of the words which the lawyer and their betters evidently deemed so important. A silence fell, though several pairs of eyes made a tour of inspection in the direction of Miss Badsworth.

A red-coated figure rose at the bottom of the room, and a rugged knotty hand swept uneasily over a head which looked more silvery without its cap.

Joseph Summers hesitated for a moment whilst his keen eyes travelled round the other occupants of the room as they had so often done over the hounds clustered about his horse; they rested momentarily upon the picture of his dead master, then fixed themselves upon the upturned face of the lawyer, and his hand made an upward motion towards the spot where the peak of his cap might have been.

"Askin' your pardon, sir, would you mind reading that last bit again?" he said.

Mr. Bailey looked round at Miss Badsworth as the principal person concerned, and she promptly replied, "Certainly, by all means". Whereupon Joe's hand went up and back once more, and he remained standing whilst the lawyer read.

Mr. Bailey looked at the old man's face when he came to the end just to see if he was satisfied. The face was inscrutable, till with one more glance at the portrait, Summers said, in a low voice, but with much intent:—

"Well, I'm damned; might just so well be sent to look for a fox in Hyde Park."

It must have been Charles Badsworth who chuckled audibly.

The butler threw open the door seeing that the meeting was ended, and the housekeeper whispered as she passed, "How could you, Mr. Summers?" to which remark there was no reply. When a little later the stud-groom seemed inclined to open a debate, all the answer he got was, "I make no comments".

CHAPTER IX.

VICTOR BICKERSDYKE preserved a gravity of manner which did him credit under the circumstances. The wheel of fortune had at last turned in his direction, and he felt an inward elation which strongly tempted him to burst into a war whoop, but he forbore to present aught but a solemn countenance. There was no doubt about it, his Aunt Lavinia was in a hole, large enough, deep enough, with slippery sides and crumbling edges. When a person was bound down to undertake an impossibility, or what was virtually an impossibility, and he, Bickersdyke, was the one to be favoured by failure to fulfil the terms, well, then——

"Don't you think a whisky and soda would freshen things up, encourage thought, and drive dull care away?" he said to Jack Morgan standing at the library window with his hands in his pockets and oppressed by a general feeling of despondency.

"There could be no harm in trying," Jack replied good-naturedly; he had not liked Bickersdyke from the first, and somehow he liked him less now, but it was not in his nature to be churlish.

Jack felt they—meaning Miss Badsworth, himself and the estate generally—were pounded, and he was reminded of a certain Major Creswell whom he had often seen riding aimlessly up and down the side of a fence trying to find an exit suited to his limited nerve. "He had to go back," he said to himself, but in an audible voice.

"Who?" asked Bickersdyke, who had rung the bell.

"Who? Oh, Bailey, the lawyer."

"Damn the lawyer, we can get on without him. By the way, the old man must have been pretty mad."

"Who? Bailey?" Jack asked, wilfully misunderstanding.

"No. My uncle."

"I've been thinking of that. It's the queerest business ever set down in writing, I should say."

Victor Bickersdyke put down his glass hurriedly.

"You don't mean you think my aunt will dispute the Will?"

Jack Morgan looked at his companion and read anxiety on his face, and said doubtfully:—

"I can't say; not the Will, but the codicil. You see, the cab horse fell when the Squire was in town, and Bailey said that during an interview with him Mr. Badsworth not only mentioned the fact but sprang up and hurried away when he saw a few drops of rain on the window. Of course his head might have been injured, and it seems this precious codicil was drafted that very evening or the next day."

"There's not much evidence in that, is there?"

Bickersdyke filled up again.

"Not much, but some, of course," Jack replied, taking delight in spinning the man who had settled himself in an arm-chair with an air of future proprietorship. "There may be more when we come to inquire," he added. He was well aware, and had made Mr. Bailey understand, that the spots of rain on the window simply meant a thaw.

"You understand, Mr. Morgan, I shall keep a pretty keen eye on the fulfilment of all conditions," Bickersdyke said, filling up again.

"I've not a doubt of it," Jack replied, feeling inclined to wring the man's neck. "Unfortunately I shall be compelled to do the same."

"Another thing, Mr. Morgan, be good enough to keep clear of a certain young lady in Cornwall. She is as good as engaged to me." Bickersdyke winked one of his fishy eyes.

"I don't see that her name comes into this business at all, Mr. Bickersdyke." Jack made a desperate effort at self-control.

"I daresay not, but this may make all the difference; women like to be able to spread themselves."

Jack had a vision of a girl with curly brown hair standing cap in hand over a dead fox with a pack of harriers baying around her; he saw white arms, a lavender cotton frock, and a pair of merry brown eyes; he heard a soft musical voice describing a separator, and his anger was kindled.

"I shouldn't have thought Miss Lavinia Badsworth was a fool," he said. "Excuse me, I have a great deal to do."

"I wonder what the deuce he meant," Bickersdyke muttered as the door closed; then he filled up again and fell asleep.

Half-way across tbe hall Jack Morgan stopped and ejaculated "Great Scott!" The late Squire's business room was close at hand, he entered, unlocked a drawer, and extracted a copy of the Will.

For twenty minutes he studied the codicil before he refolded the paper and locked it away.

"The law is queer," he said to himself. "It's an awkward place undoubtedly, and one doesn't know what the landing is like, but it seems to me the only way out."

The all-absorbing topic of what Jack Morgan called "a way out" did much to dispel the depressing influence of "the empty chair" that evening. To Charles Badsworth and Victor Bickersdyke that chair meant nothing; only Lavinia Badsworth and Jack Morgan missed the familiar face and cheery voice.

Bickersdyke had been with difficulty roused by the butler in time for dinner; during that meal he had preserved an air of semi-drunken gravity which might have been amusing under other circumstances. Subsequently he had disappeared, and left the discussion of affairs to a council of three.

Face to face with the difficulties which beset her, and contained practical rather than theoretical matters, Miss Badsworth was weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"What is to be done, Charles?" she asked for at least the fifth time.

Charles Badsworth walked up and down the room just as his brother would have done.

There is only one thing *to* be done," he replied. "You must fulfil the conditions somehow. You are good, you know, at woman's rights, and woman's emancipation, and what not; now's your time. It's a big job, but with your business habits, which I presume you possess, you ought to have much in your favour. After all, you will only have to do what plenty of men because they can get across country think they can do provided they can get enough money—hunt hounds." Then after one more turn, "Poor Hugo must have been as mad as blazes".

"But, Charles, he *wasn't*. I've been thinking it over and I'll tell you what occurred."

Miss Badsworth described her brother's visit to town and the conversation which took place after dinner.

"Hugo always scoffed at what he called my fads, and I confess on that occasion his remarks irritated me, for the worst of it was a great deal that he said had a foundation of truth. I recollect he told me that women failed in business matters" (Charles gave a short grunt of assent), "and I replied that men made a great fuss over everything and called it business."

"There's what you call a foundation of truth in that too," Charles said.

"At all events, poor Hugo got rather hot over it, and said if I had one of his day's work to do I should know what work was, or something to that effect. I remarked that if I had it to do I should probably manage it, and he replied 'Would you?' We parted good friends, for he said he should go to the club before we quarrelled."

"Hum," Charles Badsworth grunted, pausing in his walk. "There was nothing in that for him to alter his Will about, and place in jeopardy the working of his whole estate. The date is so recent he can hardly have made another."

"All the papers have been looked over, and a complete search made," Jack Morgan said. "The country lawyer

whom Mr. Badsworth employed in local matters declares that nothing of the sort has passed through his hands, and Bailey, of course, says the same."

"Well, then, Lavinia, there is nothing else left but for you to comply with that confounded codicil, or forfeit the whole thing except your ten thousand pounds."

"I'm afraid the latter will be the only course open to me. I might manage the estate and the farm; but the hounds, Charles!"

"Yes, I know, there's the rub, and that's what makes me say that Hugo was as mad as mad can be. It wasn't that Hugo knew nothing about it, he knew all that was worth knowing; his hounds are as near perfection as breeding and care can make them; he was aware that hunting doesn't grow on a tree like gooseberries, and yet he—God bless my soul, he *must* have been mad!"

"But he wasn't, Charles, I'm convinced of it; and if he had been, the difficulty would still remain," Miss Badsworth said piteously.

"I can only see two courses: one, you must become a confirmed invalid, and get some specialist to send you abroad, or you must go through with the thing. You can't possibly let that drunken fellow—I'm sorry to say it of a kinsman of ours, and I have talked to him like a father—you can't let him play ducks and drakes with the estate." Charles Badsworth presented his ultimatum and resumed his walk.

"No," his sister replied, "not if I can help it, but I can no more pose as a sham invalid than I can manage and hunt the hounds."

Jack Morgan sat as a silent listener whilst the brother and sister looked at the case in all its bearings.

"You'd be robbed all round, no doubt, Lavinia," Charles said, returning to the subject after an excursion. "Horses, forage, meal; horseflesh would be up in price no doubt in more senses than one. Kennel huntsman, stud-groom, hunt servants, to say nothing of bailiff and labourers, would have

a rare time, and the poultry bill would be big enough for a six-days-a-week country, but it's only for a year, and you could have some one at your elbow. Anyway, Victor would rob you more. Don't you think you might manage that month of hunting? It's smart work, two days a week in all weathers, but——"

"Charles," Miss Badsworth broke in, "I can't, if I would."

"Have a good first whip; and get down and let go your horse at the first fence, or something of that sort. Can you ride, Lavinia?"

"After a fashion, but not what you would call ride. Mr. Morgan, is there no way out?"

Jack Morgan, thus appealed to, drew a copy of the Will from his pocket.

"I hardly know, Miss Badsworth, it's a nasty blind place, with a two to one chance of a fall, still it might be a way out. I don't know much of the law, but taking my own case I've noticed that what applies to other people rarely applies to me. I have known cases where the whole business turned on the omission of a word, and then again in one which appeared to be identical the judge has strongly pointed out the *intention*, and then the case has gone the other way."

Mr. Morgan spread the copy of the Will upon the table, and pointed out that "my sister Lavinia Badsworth," or "the before-mentioned Lavinia Badsworth," was named, but that in the last clause "Lavinia Badsworth," with no prefix, nor words that connected her with what had gone before, was deputed to hunt the hounds for one calendar month, *viz.*, the month of November.

Charles Badsworth carefully read the codicil. Then he looked up and said:—

"It is certainly so, but I don't think we are any forwarder; what difference does it make?"

"I was thinking of Miss Lavvy," Jack said in a low voice.

CHAPTER X.

"By Jove! stop a bit! let me think!" Charles Badsworth exclaimed, drawing a chair to the table and examining the codicil once more. "I've been casting back; natural enough with all these pros and cons and conditions about. Yes, it's Lavinia Badsworth pure and simple. Lucky you holloaed, Morgan, though I hate getting their heads up if I can possibly help it. Lavvy could do it no doubt; she might be a bit slow in getting away from a big covert, but she would be quick enough to learn, and there is nothing down here that would stop her after what she has been used to. She would want the hint to go a bit faster at some of the fences, and it's only a month."

"There would be the summer exercising and the cubbing," Jack said, not so much by way of throwing cold water on the scheme, as furthering certain vague ideas of rendering assistance.

"To be sure, she will want to know the hounds and they must know her; she would know them all in a week," Charles Badsworth said with pride.

"I suppose, Charles, you are talking of your daughter, my niece," Miss Badsworth said, as one who sees the glimmer of a gas lamp in a fog.

"Of course," Charles replied, trying to gather the loose ends of the scheme.

"Is she—that sort of girl?" Miss Badsworth asked.

"Eh? What did you say? Yes, to be sure. Ask Morgan, he has seen her kill her fox."

"I meant, is she——" Miss Badsworth, who was rarely at the loss for a word, paused.

"No, she is not, Miss Badsworth," Jack Morgan replied with confidence.

"Do you mean to say Lavvy isn't capable of helping us out of this fix at a pinch?" Mr. Badsworth asked, turning shortly upon the speaker.

"Not a bit of it. I only answered the question which was in Miss Badsworth's mind, at least as I gathered it."

"Now, let us see what it comes to," Charles Badsworth continued. "We may take it for granted Victor will dispute the case and there will be an action of some sort. You seem to think, Morgan, that stress would be laid on the intention; that, in fact, if Lavinia Badsworth had to keep up the hounds, farm and estate, the same Lavinia would be included in the hunting clause."

"That is what I fear would be the result," Jack replied.

"Well, I don't know, the circumstances are peculiar, and there are some good points to be made if some good, sporting counsel like Hornicroft were engaged. There is nothing to show that Hugo didn't know all about us, though we weren't personally in touch of late years. Lavvy, for instance, is specially down for five hundred pounds."

He took a turn up the room, and addressed the company of two from the far end.

"Here is a man," he said, "who has a two-days-a-week country and a smart pack of hounds, a man addicted to sport, but apparently a first-rate man of business. Now would he be likely to ruin the country simply out of spite for being taken away from it? Well, he is aware that, from the line she takes, his sister is a woman of business." Lavinia held up her hand. "Stop a bit, there is no evidence that he *didn't*, as far as we know; to her he devises his estate *and the hounds*. Now comes the difficulty; he would be well aware that the said sister, though capable of business, was no huntsman or huntswoman; in fact, that the art, for it is an art, can only be learnt by apprenticeship. Would he ruin the sport and ruin the hounds? Now, why shouldn't he know that his niece, the other Lavinia, knew

something about it? Recollect the second whip is son of Tom Barlow at Tordon. Well, he draws up this infernal codicil himself and omits the words 'my niece' just as he omitted 'my sister,' or 'the before-mentioned'. That's the line I should take if I were counsel for the defendant."

"Might I suggest counsel's opinion?" Jack said.

"Counsel's opinion be damned—I beg your pardon. I hate lawyers, and law unless it becomes an absolute necessity. Brave it out, Lavinia; that fool Victor is as likely as not to drink himself to death before the end of November next."

"Charles, how dreadful!" Miss Badsworth exclaimed.

"Just what I tell *him;* but the idiot won't listen. I say brave it out, let it be tacitly understood that you intend to carry out the conditions, and—well—I'll sound Lavvy. It's possible you haven't a leg to stand on, Lavinia, but chance it, and see what turns up. Do you know anything about book-keeping?"

"I can keep accounts, if that is what you mean," Miss Badsworth replied in a voice which showed that she felt her powers were being discredited.

"Well, it is and it isn't. Morgan tells me the accounts are all in most perfect order. Estate, stables, kennels and farm. Hugo kept them all himself; he must have been a busy man, for I know what it is in my small way. There are day-books and ledgers for each department, and every year he has had them audited."

For the first time for years Miss Badsworth felt herself out of her depth. The schemes which she had undertaken, or had given her countenance to, might stand or fall and no one be much the worse. Treasurers had done the financial work when there was any; in fact with the exception of the Society for the Abolition of Art Needlework, etc., which had been thrust upon her by Lady Theodosia Booker, and the Society for taking over the Responsibility of Parents, the real work was off her hands. At this moment she devoutly wished she had stuck only to her schemes for the improvement of women's social status. Now she had to

face a reality, and it looked so different in practice from what it would have done in theory that her spirit sank, and for the first time in her life she felt something akin to panic.

"Charles, it's beyond me!" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense! Rubbish! Why, if I were you, I'd put on a red coat and breeches and boots, and see the thing out, and Victor——"

"Charles!"

"Well, I was going to say damned, but I won't. Where's the difficulty? For years, as I gather from the papers, you've been advocating women's rights, and trying to revolutionise women's dress, though I notice you avoid illustration in your own person. What's the difference between rationals and breeches and boots? Where do you draw the line? You go to a man milliner, why not to a breeches maker? You show your—er—legs on a bicycle, why the deuce shouldn't you on a horse; if you wear boots, it doesn't much matter what—well, anyhow, why not act up to your theories?"

"My dear Charles, how would you like to see your daughter do it?"

"There you are, you see! When the matter comes home, even when backed up by a necessity—a positive necessity—your theories hold no more water than a sieve. Lavvy? Well, I haven't asked her; but Lavvy's a practical person."

Miss Badsworth was silent, and her brother resumed his walk, working out a scheme. Presently she said, "How like you are to Hugo".

"I hope I'm not as mad. I should discharge the lot."

"Whom?"

"The stable and kennel men; at least I should have them all up and give them the option to go if they like, or else stick by you and hold their tongues till the end of the season. I wouldn't part with Summers if gold would keep him, but he will have a will of his own if I'm not mistaken. Then you must go round and see all the farmers and make friends with them; you must ride about and learn the country and

the coverts during the summer, and above all must keep the accounts, so that if there is any hitch you may be able to satisfy our friend Mr Morgan."

"Charles, I'm nearly fifty."

Her brother's face softened. "Poor Lavinia," he said, "it's deuced hard on you, but it seems Hugo took you at your own estimate of yourself. If you think yourself physically incapable, then, well—there is only Lavvy to fall back upon."

"But how would she like——"

"I don't know; she has broken many a youngster, and you don't suppose we should spoil them at first with a woman's saddle." He thought for a moment, then he said in a gentle tone, "Lavvy would help any mortal, man, woman or child, who was in a fix".

Jack Morgan felt a strange sensation within him, and with difficulty he forbore from saying "Hear, hear!"

So gradually the conversation softened down, and the elements of a more or less practical scheme developed themselves. Charles avoided personalities, though he impressed upon his sister the necessity of giving her whole time to the matter in hand. "Anyway I'll write a line to Lavvy," he said, "and we'll hear what she says."

"If we only knew what the law would be," Jack said, when he and Charles Badsworth discussed the affair in the smoking-room later.

"Just so; but if some infernal lawyer were to give opinion against us, Morgan, it would take the curl out of our tails. Any fool who can sit on a horse can ride over a flagged course; it's the getting over a blind and strange country that wants the skill and energy."

Before he slept Charles Badsworth wrote a characteristic letter to his daughter. He briefly but clearly described the state of affairs generally and the mad codicil in particular.

"Your Aunt Lavinia is not the sort of woman you would expect to meet after reading reports of her doings, and your Uncle Hugo ought to have known it, but in handing over

things to her care he must have imagined her something different from what she is; she could no more hunt the hounds than fly; she is very nice but purely theoretical.

"Now, the question is, what is to be done? It would be folly to let the estate go to Victor. (I'm sorry to say he is rarely what one might call sober.) The codicil provides that Lavinia Badsworth shall hunt the hounds one month from the first of November. Will you help your aunt out of the mess by taking on the job? Think it over. I don't wish you to do *anything* you object to. If you see your way send a wire.

"Your affectionate father.

"*P.S.*—We are lucky in having Mr. Morgan as sole executor; the more I see of him the more I like him, and, of course, he knows the place and people."

Miss Lavvy read the letter two or three times, especially the postscript, then she put on a tweed cap, whistled "the Reformer," and went out. Up amongst the gorse, where the patches of heather formed the outposts of the moorland, she sat down in the sunshine and thought. Then she took out the letter and read it once more.

The sun shone brightly in its April strength, and a soft fresh breeze from the sea gently shook the curls upon her forehead, pushed as they were slightly out of place by the hand upon which her head was resting.

There is no place like the open air to think in, and so she sat and thought.

"Dad wants me to do it, that is evident, though the dear thinks he has left me to decide."

She read the postscript again. "I should think Mr. Morgan could be nice in an emergency," she said, and then for a few minutes whistled softly.

"Come on, Johnnie!" she exclaimed presently, rising with a spring to her feet, "we'll send the telegram," and forthwith the two made a bee line for Tordon.

That evening Charles Badsworth handed a yellow paper to his sister. "All right—anything to help—Lavvy."

"She's a good sort is Lavvy," was all he said.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a natural thing that members of the Cranston Hunt should feel themselves aggrieved. The disposal of Hugo Badsworth's property, and the provision relating to the hounds, was no secret.

The hunt had gone on for generations; it had always owed its existence to the liberality of some one individual member of the Badsworth family, but it reckoned that existence as personal property, and when it was threatened with petticoat government it attempted to "go out on strike". That is to say, Major Creswell, a fussy little man, a martinet (as he thought) anywhere out of doors, or where his wife was not, rebelled against the idea that the management should be in the hands of a woman, and that their sport should be ruined by female inefficiency. Upon this theme he harped until he stirred up sundry others to hold a meeting, and persuaded Sir Gregory Sorter, Bart., to permit that meeting to be held at his house.

Now, Sir Gregory, though a baronet, was impecunious, so it was natural that he named three o'clock as the time of meeting, thereby avoiding any display of hospitality beyond "a cup of tea" when the proceedings were over. As the only wealthy person in the neighbourhood, the attendance of Lady Flora Parkfield (a plain-speaking old lady, but a large landowner) was solicited and secured; but people felt, much as King Ahab did about Michaiah, that there was no saying what view she might take. Curiosity and a certain searching after truth caused many to attend, so the room was well filled, and Sir Gregory's mental calculations as to the cost of the inevitable tea at so much a head was upset (he

couldn't remember the figure he had carried) by his being voted to the chair. It went against the grain with Major Creswell to make a proposition which he felt should have been made by some one else in his favour.

Sir Gregory rose with some hesitation both in speech and manner.

"Gentlemen, I——"

"And ladies," put in Lady Flora, with a hand to one ear, though she was only slightly deaf.

"Gentlemen and ladies, I—er—regret the sad circumstance which has brought us together——"

"Postcards; I hate and detest postcards for all the servants to read," Lady Flora remarked in what she supposed was *sotto voce*.

"I should say, necessitated our meeting to-day. For twenty-five years we have—er—been indebted to our—er—lamented friend——"

"It's twenty-seven," said Lady Flora, fixing the speaker with a pair of tortoise-shell mounted glasses on a nine-inch handle.

"Twenty-seven—I—er—thought it was twenty-five. Our good friend, who, as I may say—er—died in harness——"

"Saddle, surely," suggested her ladyship.

"I understand from the—ah—remarkable provisions of his—er—Will, the management of the hounds and country are——"

"Is," from Lady Flora.

"Is vested in his—er—sister, Lady——"

"Miss," corrected her ladyship.

"I should say Miss Lavinia Badsworth."

"She's Miss Badsworth; I know all the ins and outs of the family," said Lady Flora, and Sir Gregory began to writhe.

"Well—er—the question is—ah—what are we to do?"

Sir Gregory looked round as a swimmer gazes for the last time at the blue sky when he feels the exhaustion which he knows means death, and sank into his chair.

There was a slight murmur of whispered conversation on all hands, but no one was inclined to make a suggestion, knowing well the only course which could secure independence.

Major Creswell sprang into the breach—that is, he rose and cleared his throat.

Lady Flora screwed round the battery of her glasses and chuckled. For the first time in his life the Major was under fire.

"I consider that the members of the Cranston Hunt have been grossly insulted by the terms proposed for carrying on the working of the country." (Several murmurs of "Oh, oh!")

"Mr. Chairman," said Lady Flora, "allow me to ask what proposition is before the meeting? I understand that Hugo Badsworth left a Will, as he had every right to do. What is the proposition?"

Sir Gregory stammered that there was none, but he thought Major Creswell might be going to move one.

"I must protest against interruption," said the Major.

"I suppose you allude to me," said Lady Flora. "If so, I shall ask what questions I please. The man's dead, and I won't hear him abused—insult, indeed! What did you ever pay towards the hunt beyond a miserable sovereign to the poultry fund? Well, go on, let us hear what you have to say."

The Major was purple in the face, but he was reminded of his wife and took a humbler tone.

"The fact is," he said, "it is useless for us to continue the hunt upon the lines laid down by the late master's Will. I—er" (here he produced a piece of paper) "I propose that a sum be collected and the country hunted by a committee." The Major looked round for a seconder with a semi-triumphant expression.

Jack Morgan rose and was greeted with the clapping of hands, in which Lady Flora joined.

"Before this proposition is seconded," he said, "I think

it would be well if we went a little into figures, so that every one present may know what are the requirements of the case; but previous to giving you a statement of expenses, I must express my regret that this meeting did not open with a suitable tribute to the man to whom we all have been so deeply indebted in the past."

"They were all wondering who was going to pay," said Lady Flora.

"Possibly; but though I am no orator I hope to be allowed to preface my remarks by a few words of heartfelt gratitude to the late master." (Applause.) Jack dealt with the subject in simple words, but every now and again his voice broke, as voices will which speak of severed friendships. Lady Flora frequently nodded approval, and the company murmured its assent to the words of the speaker.

"Now, the actual cost of hunting the country has been quite two thousand five hundred pounds per annum, and if a committee were to undertake the matter they must face the purchase of a pack of hounds as well. Of course it is open to them to negotiate with some moneyed man who would partly pay expenses for the pleasure of hunting hounds himself."

"And you might get one old woman instead of another, you mean?" asked Lady Flora amidst laughter.

"Possibly," Jack went on. "Anyway the committee would have to find about one thousand six hundred pounds themselves, and perhaps more."

"Shall we put the promised subscriptions on paper?" asked Sir Gregory feebly.

"Better have the proposition seconded first," said Lady Flora.

Each person looked at the other, but none moved, till a farmer, Major Creswell's only tenant, being caught by the military eye, rose and said "I will," mopping his face as he sat down.

"The man thinks he's at a christening," Lady Flora muttered.

Jack was on his legs in a moment.

"I propose as an amendment that the members of the hunt support the arrangements made by the late master in his Will."

"And I second it," said Lady Flora with decision.

Jack Morgan pointed out that though the provisions were extraordinary they were only temporary.

"And in that time a whole pack of hounds may be ruined," growled the Major.

"Perhaps you can take on the huntsman's place and put them right afterwards, Major," Jack said. "Anyway it is a great thing that the members should be spared the expense, etc."

People felt a relief. The Major withdrew his proposition, and the amendment was carried. Mutterings and pessimistic views were naturally uttered in the library where tea was served.

"Plenty of display and very little tea," Lady Flora said to Jack Morgan in a voice which he feared would reach Lady Sorter or her quick-eared daughters. "I know what it was, Jack, they thought I should put down a handsome sum," she went on. "What on earth induced a man like Hugo Badsworth to make such foolish conditions?"

"I'm hanged if I know, Lady Flora; if it hadn't been in his Will, I should have thought it a practical joke against his sister on account of her peculiar views."

"Ah! meant her to put on the breeches in earnest, but it *was* in his Will. I know little of her, and I don't fancy those sort of people much; it's all very well supposing one never lived beyond forty, but, Jack, there's no provision for old age; now just fancy me in bloomers!"

Jack burst out laughing at the idea.

"You might have a divided skirt, or whatever it is," he said.

The old lady hit him good-humouredly with her fan. "Get me some more tea before it's all gone. I'll go over and call. Come and dine with me the day after to-morrow."

Whilst the members of the hunt exercised themselves over their future prospects, three authorities at Cranston Lodge formed opinions of their own—Mr. Hibbert, the stud-groom, Mr. Summers, the kennel huntsman, and Mr. Grimes, the bailiff. It was tacitly agreed that Mr. Abel Hermon, the head-gardener, had no *locus standi*, because the introduction of "womenfolk" into the arrangement of his department "couldn't make a mossle of difference".

Mr. Hibbert and Grimes foregathered at Summers' cottage, for the simple reason that the latter was a man who "kept himself *to* himself," and neither the stud-groom nor the bailiff could be quite sure of the line the old man would take.

Each felt that the "triple alliance," if it were secured, would exist, as it were, only on paper. There were jealousies, just as there were perquisites, in the various departments. Hibbert and Summers had one common interest which was bound up in horses and hounds. The stud-groom declared that without good horses in good condition the hunt could not go on. Summers on the other hand could never be induced to look upon a horse as anything but a machine to carry him to hounds; in his best days he never could or would tell you anything about a horse beyond the fact that he was handy, or a persistent refuser, which latter animal nothing would induce him to ride a second time. "A huntsman hasn't time to bother about a horse," he used to say. The dangers of female government were the bailiff's only claim to attend the conference.

It was a fine afternoon, and the bailiff and stud-groom having reconnoitred from a distance and seen the kennel huntsman employed in tying up a rose tree in his garden, decided to approach from opposite directions. The manœuvre was satisfactory, and each visitor in turn was asked to step in and sit down. There was an air of armed neutrality about Summers; that was the worst of him, indications either of peace or war were not to be gathered from his weather-beaten, solemn countenance.

CHAPTER XII.

SUMMERS preceded his guests and led the way into the parlour; here he motioned them to be seated, and placed a brass tobacco box and three long clay pipes upon the table; then he passed through a doorway and returned in a few minutes bearing a large brown jug upon which was depicted a stag with enormous antlers carried erect, three hounds and a hump-backed figure on a dray horse in close pursuit. (What was pursuing what depended upon where you began.)

"It's warm," Summers said. He was a man of few words.

Each man filled his pipe, the box of matches was passed round, but still silence reigned; each waited for the other.

Perhaps of the three, Grimes the bailiff was the most nervous, hence his echo of the remark that "it *was* warm," intended to be conciliatory.

Summers sucked meditatively at his pipe, but his eyes searched the faces of his guests.

"Well, anyway, I don't suppose you came to talk of the weather," he said at length.

"No, you are right, Mr. Summers," they both said together.

"It's this here business," the stud-groom continued. "What are we going to do?"

"That depends," Summers replied, looking round as though he had a beaten fox before him and wasn't quite certain how to make his cast.

"I don't hold with womenfolk when it comes to farmin'," Grimes remarked with boldness, seeing that his fellows

shared his doubts. "Things has to be done at the right time, whether it's buyin' and sellin', or plowin' and reapin'."

"No doubt of it, Grimes, but there's old Lady Flora who's got as much land on her hands as most folk, they tell me her farm takes some beating; but then she's got Mangles. I don't say he's any better than you, mind you; but if things goes on well with one female, what's the odds with another?"

"There I agree with you, Summers," said the stud-groom, "farmin' and hosses are quite different things. When you gets hosses fit and in condition it does you no credit unless they are ridden, and folk see them where they should be. Now, if your hosses are messed about and never show up in front, it's Hibbert's fault; they're too fat or too soft or too something. It won't suit me, I'm off; hosses and hounds ain't the same as farmin'."

Summers surveyed the ceiling in silence for quite half a minute before he said:—

"Hosses and hounds ain't the same either. You can sell off the hosses and buy a new lot, if you've the money, and it won't take a conjurer to get them in condition if a man knows something about it, but hounds—they take making to be what mine are; you can't leave them to *any one*. There's the puppies to go out to walk, and the puppies to come in; there's the draft to go, and some one must know something about it. It's eddication they'll want, and who's to eddicate them without a schoolmaster?"

There was a knock at the door, to which Summers replied "Come in," and then the three men rose to their feet, for a tall lady entered, dressed in black.

After the first knock-down blow Miss Badsworth, under the able advice of her brother, had risen to the occasion, and her usual energy had returned. Charles Badsworth, before returning to Cornwall to see to his own affairs, had been over the farm, the stables and kennels, and made his report.

"Keep the bailiff; do what you like about Hibbert, his horses look well, but he is easily replaced, and don't part

with Summers if you can help it. That is my tip, but you must manage things yourself, at all events to begin with."

Fortune favoured Miss Badsworth, for as it happened she killed the three birds mentioned with one stone.

"Pray sit down," she said in her pleasant voice, feeling some compassion for the three individuals whose shuffling feet betokened their uneasiness. "I am glad I happened to find you here; let me see, *you* are the bailiff, *you* are the stud-groom, and *you*, of course, are Joseph Summers, the huntsman; I've often heard of you."

"Kennel huntsman, now, ma'am," Summers said, touching his silvery hair.

"Well, forgive me if I made a mistake. I'm afraid I don't know the difference, but perhaps I shall learn." Miss Badsworth smiled and took a chair with her back to the cottage window with its red-leaded pots of scarlet geraniums and pelargoniums.

"Go on smoking, I don't wish to disturb you, but I am glad you are all three here," she said.

Hibbert and Grimes resumed their pipes with awkward smiles; words which they had lately uttered seemed to stand like spectres behind their chairs. The kennel huntsman's long clay lay on the table, and his eyes rested respectfully on the lady seated before him. He might have received orders to draw Clintbury Wood when the leaves were falling in showers.

Miss Badsworth took credit for her own composure. "They may laugh at me," she thought, "and I may be well out of my depth in this business, but certainly meetings do give one confidence."

"Of course you all know the terms of the late Squire's Will; it's a matter of common property," she said, and at the first shot Grimes and Hibbert metaphorically slunk down each behind the boulder of offended dignity. Joseph Summers never moved a muscle.

"It puts things and me in rather an awkward position, and I don't mind saying I am at a loss to understand the

reason for the terms of the bequest which the late Squire made."

Both Grimes and Hibbert metaphorically peered out from behind their defences.

"When an estate has been managed for many years as this estate has been managed a change of any sort is bad enough: people get used to one another and one another's ways: but when such a change takes place as that which occurs now I can easily understand that serious misgivings must enter people's minds—in fact, I feel them myself. I don't scruple to say that the chief difficulty in my case consists in dealing with the Cranston Hunt, which I believe has been carried on for nearly half a century to the satisfaction of the majority by the late master and my father before him."

"Every one, unless it might be Major Creswell, and he never was pleased with nothing, if I might make so bold, ma'am," Summers remarked.

"Very well: but that, you must understand, makes it all the worse for me, for I confess I have everything to learn."

"And there's a deal to be learnt, ma'am," Summers said sympathetically. "Man and boy, I've been at it fifty-five years, and there's something to learn yet."

"I've no doubt of it: but you must please to recollect it's through no fault of mine, for I cannot help myself. Well, such being the case, I have got to consider how it is all to be done. I shall want help—not time-service, but hearty co-operation. I don't wish any one to remain in my service who thinks he can do better elsewhere, but I confess I should like to have around me those who were in my dear brother's employ, and who would, in consequence, be conversant with the place and its requirements. I want two things—first, hearty co-operation, as I have said, and second, that those I employ should hold their tongues."

Miss Badsworth leant back in her chair and surveyed her audience. It was a very di
was accustomed to addr

would hardly have acknowledged the fact in so many words that there was a reality in her case now which [illegible] had been foreign to the matter in hand.

The trio of dependants probably hardly knew what they expected to hear. All kinds of rumours as to Miss Badsworth and her doings had been buzzing around. That she was a real lady was the impression that struck them all.

Summers slightly shifted his position.

"I'm an old man, ma'am," he said with an upward sweep of his hand towards his forehead. "But the job before you, from all I hear, is a difficult one. I've been on it for years and I know what they are; if they seem different now to what they used to be, I can't help thinking it's money because I knows more about them. If it's not presuming to say so, I'd like to see you through the job."

"Well, that's very nice of you, Summers. I'll try and learn what I can, but I am not as young as I was."

"To be sure, ma'am, that's true, no doubt, but it's never too late to learn—something."

Miss Badsworth laughed, it was the dominating quality of the voice which tickled her.

Hibbert and the bailiff cast their previous opinions to the winds, possibly each thought there would be [illegible] but what they said was genuine enough—if Miss Badsworth would give them the chance they would do their best. In words to that effect.

Miss Badsworth wrote a few words in her note-book.

"Then that is settled," she said as she closed it. "I confess I am glad to work with those who know the place, but be good enough to remember that I am not to be continually told 'what always was done,' unless I ask. Now, Summers, I should like to visit your wife, if she is at home."

"She's different from what I expected," Hibbert said when he and the bailiff were left alone, to which the latter replied, "That she is, and no mistake".

"I've an idea she will [illegible]," Grimes added as [illegible] and the [illegible] "[illegible]

[illegible] ertise-

thing sort of masterful about her." He glanced sideways at his companion to see how he took the remark. Between the two there always existed a tacit jealousy based on certain percentages from dealers in forage which was purchased beyond the area of the bailiff's domain. Hibbert, however, had the advantage of a piece of straw in his mouth, which, being twisted about in unexpected directions, diverted the spectator's eye from any successful attempt at thought-reading.

"I dessay," was all he said, but his inward conviction was that it would take a sight of women to get over William Hibbert when he meant business.

There were no affairs of state mentioned during Miss Badsworth's visit to the old huntsman's wife, in fact, after a few friendly words on her visitor's part, the old lady took the opportunity, which seldom occurred, of pouring out the troubles and trials which attach themselves to the age of well-nigh threescore and ten, and thereunto were added many like words which related to family history generally, and that of her only son James, who had died thirty years before, and whose early decease proved the love of the gods. Time had well-nigh obliterated the fact that he had been a rackety youth, and a source of trouble to his parents.

Miss Badsworth was sympathetic; she sat and listened, putting in a word here and there, so that when she rose to leave she left golden opinions behind her.

"When can I come and see the hounds, Summers?" she asked, as she passed the old man who had returned to his rose tree.

"Now, ma'am, if you are so minded."

"I'm afraid I cannot come to-day. I'll be down soon."

And so Miss Badsworth put off the evil hour.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE necessity of a secretary who was a good accountant was borne in upon Miss Badsworth the moment she saw the well-kept ledgers to which Jack Morgan introduced her.

Jack never liked making himself disagreeable, but he experienced a horrible feeling of doubt whether Miss Badsworth would succeed in carrying out the requirements of her brother's Will or not. He had visions of courts of law and Victor Bickersdyke, and therefore no choice was left him but to set the matter plainly before the lady concerned.

Now, Miss Badsworth had always been told, by those who looked to her for a lead in their various schemes for female regeneration, that she was a business woman, and she really had believed the fact to be true. She had kept accounts of sorts and had been used to make up deficiencies; but book-keeping as a science had never been part of her education; its methodical simplicity presented all the dangers of an uncharted archipelago to a mariner. Of all the female enthusiasts with whom she had been brought into contact not one name suggested itself to her as reliable in the present emergency. There was no scope for dreams and visions, nor original ideas even, in the business in hand; no doubt it was common-place enough, but it was both startling and humiliating to run over the list of enthusiasts and not find one name upon which reliance could be placed. Charles Badsworth had said that his daughter Lavvy would be able to help where needed. It might be so, but Miss Badsworth having begun to doubt herself and "the armour in which she trusted," continued and ended in doubting her brother's judgment.

By way of clearing the ground she inserted an advertise-

ment in the *Morning Post* setting forth her requirements. The result was rather more confusing than she had anticipated. After the brief interval of one day the pile of letters on the breakfast table was appalling. Forty-three missives, according to their own showing, emanated from persons fully qualified, as they thought, to fill the post of private secretary to Miss Badsworth.

Jack Morgan had suggested a man, a clerk from some accountant's office, whose business it would be to keep everything posted up to date, and who would be no bother; but Miss Badsworth's theories sprang up with as many heads as the Hydra of Lerna; she had proved over and over again to her own satisfaction and that of a sympathetic, if one-sided, audience that a woman was quite as capable as a man, more so, perhaps, and it wasn't in the Badsworth character to go back on its opinion without something more than an ordinary struggle, so Jack Morgan declined the part of Hercules, and said, "Very well, you have every right to do as you please," and Miss Badsworth did so. That pile of correspondence could easily be dealt with, consequently it was laid aside till breakfast was over.

There was no lack of competent persons; some enclosed photographs (as if they thought that personal appearance might cover deficiencies), some did not.

Judging from those who bravely inserted their ages, these ranged from seventeen to sixty; nearly all were domesticated (which to a man would have given the idea of cats). Some were used to the best society, others reduced the charge for their services in consideration of being permitted to move in the higher circles; some were musical; some were readers who had studied elocution; some were good croquet players; others shone in tennis; one, the sixty-year-old one, was an adept at ping-pong.

Miss Badsworth read all the letters and went through the form of tabulating them.

The portrait of Hugo Badsworth seemed to smile during the lengthy operation. The eyes said:—

"Think of a number; double it; add seven to it; take away the number you first thought of, and——"

Well, at all events, after much research twelve letters were set aside for further consideration.

Amidst the variety of qualifications Miss Badsworth lost sight of the matter in hand, *viz.*, the provision of a good accountant. A presentable person seemed necessary, rather than a useful one; the vision of the overbearing manner of Mrs. Richardson stood out as a sort of beacon giving timely warning of shoals and rocks. Of course this ought not to have been the case, but every one else will allow, and Miss Badsworth was apparently of the number which is consequently unanimous, that it makes all the difference whether a person has to dwell in your house or be foisted on to a public meeting which is capable of recuperating its common-sense subsequently in God's free air.

The one individual who began in the third person and concluded in the first would in all probability have been the most efficient of the lot, but her letter, poor soul, went into the waste-paper basket at once.

When the second post proved indisputably that the applicants had power to add to their number, Miss Badsworth sat down and sympathised with the patriarch when he saw the Egyptian waggons. So great appeared the work of cleansing the Augean stable, that the lady who was used to gladden her followers by sweeping away the obstacles of prejudice, leant her head upon her hand and gave way to the heretical doubt that after all Mr. Morgan had something on his side. She would have given worlds for a committee to whom the matter might be referred.

She was a long way off, "hull down," as mariners say, with only her topmasts, pinnacles of glory, peering out of the hazy mists of reminiscence; she had lost her identity in a measure, and was noting how the spirit (non-alcoholic) of her influence had stimulated to vigour some of her following. It may be presumed that she was seeking to obviate a sort of vote of "want of confidence" in herself which

the array of letters on the table seemed clamouring to pass.

Be this as it may, she started with a jump when the voice of the butler behind her announced her own name in measured tones—"Miss Lavinia Badsworth!"

A composed and dignified young lady, rather above the middle height, clad in a well-made black serge costume and a sailor hat, closely followed by a fox terrier with a black head and one black spot near the root of his tail, entered the room as Miss Badsworth rose with the worried expression still upon her face.

Two observant brown eyes took in that fact and the heap of letters at a glance; the dignity and composure rippled into a smile which went straight to Miss Badsworth's heart, and a soft musical voice said, "Here I am at last, aunt, come to help you if I can".

Just for one moment Miss Badsworth glanced at the girl's smiling face, with the outstretched, ungloved hand of her niece clasped between both her own, then she kissed her heartily and said:—

"My dear, I've been worried to death, and I confess I had forgotten all about your arrival; come and have some tea at once, you have had a long journey."

So the ice was broken, and aunt and niece looked furtively at one another, and Johnnie took in the unaccustomed surroundings from a post of vantage close beside his mistress.

"Lavvy," Miss Badsworth said presently, "you are not the least what I expected you to be."

"No? Well, aunt, you are not at all according to my anticipation. I hope you won't mind my saying I am agreeably disappointed. Do tell me what you thought I should be like."

"My dear child, I hardly know, but you do not look—you are not like—from what your father said I expected—well——"

"A hoyden, aunt, now didn't you? But the dear dad is often carried away when I am concerned. You see I have had

to be a son as well as a daughter to him. I daresay you will laugh, but I can be more or less of both at a pinch."

"So he said."

"Dear old dad, it's just like him; he has done his best to spoil me, aunt."

Miss Badsworth regarded her niece in silence before she said: "I don't think he has succeeded, child. And so you expected to find me something different from what I am?"

"How could I help it, aunt? I had only heard of you through the newspapers, and I naturally imagined you would be—oh! I won't say what I thought; I am quite content to find you the dear you are—there! I hope you won't mind my bringing Johnnie, he cannot bear me out of his sight. You were looking so worried when I came in; I hope nothing serious is the matter."

Miss Badsworth kept asking herself why she had never known this girl before; she watched the changes of her countenance as she spoke; it was a different phase of female character from that to which she had been accustomed.

"Well, my dear, as I daresay you know, your uncle's Will has placed all sorts of things in my hands to which I am utterly unaccustomed. I—well, I have advertised for a secretary, and those are the replies that have come already."

She pointed to the table behind her.

Lavvy glanced at the correspondence and asked for another cup of tea.

"Do you want a man or a woman, aunt?" she inquired.

"Oh, a woman, of course, my dear."

"I should have thought a man would have been more satisfactory, but what sort of work do you require from your secretary?"

As in duty bound, Miss Badsworth upheld her principles before she gave the required information. Beyond a glimmer of mirth in the brown eyes her niece made no sign.

"Those awful books, Lavvy, you have no idea what they are, and Mr. Morgan says they must be kept accurately in

case——" She hesitated, and her niece put in "things go wrong".

"Just look at them, my dear."

Lavvy looked at them, turning the pages slowly.

"They are beautifully kept, aunt; I don't see anything dreadful in them; you have only got to go on with them in the same way."

"Yes, my dear, I know, so Mr. Morgan says, but I—well, I'm not accustomed to them."

Miss Badsworth did not notice the faint tinge of pink on her niece's cheek which was conjured up by Jack Morgan's name, but then, of course, the younger lady was closely examining the ledgers.

"It will take some time to sift all that correspondence," Miss Badsworth said when aunt and niece had resumed their respective chairs.

"I suppose it will."

"I have eliminated the impossibilities and yet that heap remains, and to-morrow will probably bring more," Miss Badsworth said with a sigh.

"I suppose it will, aunt. It must be difficult to come to a decision even with the photographs to assist."

"Well, you must be tired, child. I shall be glad of your help to-morrow when we will go into the thing thoroughly."

Miss Lavvy leaned back in her chair and rubbed Johnnie's back with a tan boot, much to his satisfaction, and her aunt noticed the length of the eyelashes which almost rested on her cheek as the girl looked down at the dog. Suddenly the eyes were raised:—

"To-morrow? I don't like trusting to-morrow when one can help it. Dad put off writing to poor Uncle Hugo, and the to-morrow was too late."

"Well, my dear?"

"Couldn't we work this business together, aunt?"

"I thought we were going to try."

"I mean without this secretary. I fear I have no accomplishments. I have hardly ever played tennis or

croquet, and I have never even seen ping-pong, but I can read and write, and those 'terrible books,' as you call them, present no horrors to me. I have been used to them since I was fifteen."

"Do you really think you could undertake it, Lavvy?" Miss Badsworth asked doubtfully.

"Those—how many are there, aunt? Sixty-nine did you say? Those sixty-nine thought they could, I am only one more—the seventieth; you could but fall back upon one of the others if I didn't do."

Miss Lavvy smiled as she looked at her aunt's perplexed face.

"I was thinking of the disappointment of all the rest," Miss Badsworth said.

"But you were not going to engage them all, were you, aunt? There would have been sixty-eight disappointments if I hadn't come."

"There will be so much for you to do, Lavvy."

"Never mind, I'm not afraid of work."

"But there are those dreadful hounds. I went to the kennels the other day, and though I don't like to own it, I was frightened to death, some of them seemed so savage and ill-tempered."

To her surprise Miss Badsworth found a pair of strong arms round her neck and a laughing face suddenly close to her own.

"Auntie, I'm so glad the stupid papers made such a mess of your description. I was so afraid you were what they call an advanced woman, though I have never seen one; never mind the hounds, they will have to eat me before you come on, and I'm not the least afraid of them."

Miss Badsworth attempted to withdraw herself from her niece's clasp, but she was held close to the laughing face.

"I hope I am an 'advanced woman,' as you call it, Lavvy," she said, with attempted dignity.

"And I trust you are, auntie, for then they must be very charming people. *I* believe your heart is too big for your

body, that is all, and it is a lovely fault to have, you know."

"Now, Lavvy, for goodness sake, don't tell me you are a humbug."

"Not a bit of it, auntie, I have a strong dash of Badsworth obstinacy about me, and dad says I'm too outspoken. Anyway, I'm going to try and see you through your difficulties, and now I have seen *you*, I can't help thinking we shall manage—it's only a matter of hair."

"Hair!" Miss Badsworth exclaimed.

"Yes, hair. I shall have to be two different people, by-and-by—your niece and your huntsman. Dad has given me all the tips for the present, but the hair is my own idea." She took off her hat and ran her hand through a profusion of curly locks. "They will have to be cut off, poor things, and then—well, the other will go on top."

"Lavvy, I believe you are the most practical young woman I have ever met."

Miss Lavvy swept a courtesy which disproved the assertion that she possessed no accomplishments.

"Thanks, auntie. If you had said I was the image of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Alexandra in her youthful days, you wouldn't have paid me a greater compliment. Now, will you show me Uncle Hugo's picture? I'm told he was so like dad."

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT are you thinking about, Lavvy?"

The two ladies were enjoying the luxury of their after-dinner coffee, combined with the beauties of a June evening, on the terrace beneath the drawing-room windows at Cranston Lodge. There had been silence for a considerable time, and Lavvy from the depths of a well-cushioned basket chair, with Johnnie upon her lap, had apparently been studying the moon as it gradually ascended from gap to gap amidst the spreading branches of a fine cedar.

"It was down there a little time ago when we came out, now it is up near the top."

"What is?" her aunt asked.

"The moon, of course, I have been watching it. Do you believe in omens, auntie?"

"My dear child, I'm much too busy for that nonsense."

"But it's rather the fashion, isn't it? I see the advertisements of palmists and clairvoyants in the daily papers, and I presume people go to them or they would not advertise."

Miss Lavvy had been sedulously endeavouring to obtain an insight into her aunt's views during dinner. She had not been successful. More than once Miss Badsworth had said "but those are things which you will not understand," whereupon Lavvy had come to the conclusion that her aunt drew a line of distinction between dwellers in Cornwall and dwellers in London.

"There are plenty of silly people, my dear; they go to a palmist out of curiosity, then they are constrained to go to another to see if the prognostications tally, then, as they generally do not, a third has to be consulted. There are

those, of course, who, if they get a good account of themselves from the first, have not the moral courage to risk the explosion of the theory by taking a second opinion."

"Then it requires moral courage?" with a side glance out of the corners of her eyes. "After all, education hasn't done much."

"Education? Not done much? My dear Lavvy, what *do* you mean?"

"Simply that the standard of superstition has been raised thereby, not eradicated. The gipsies at Tordon Fair do good business still. The poor people can tell you wonderful tales of prophecies and fulfilments. You wouldn't walk under a ladder, would you, auntie?"

"I confess I avoid doing so if possible."

"So do I, but *I* confess it makes a difference if some one is on it with a paint pot or something. Perhaps education, or experience, ought to have the credit of sharpening one's powers of discrimination; rooks, for instance, forsake trees which show signs of decay. I suppose, though, that is instinct."

The baying of hounds in the distant kennels broke the stillness. Miss Lavvy sat suddenly erect and Johnnie jumped down, listening with cocked ears and head on one side.

"Dear things! How delightful it is to hear them with their big voices. Dog-hounds, those, I expect," the girl said.

"I am sure I don't know, dear," Miss Badsworth said, in a tone which evidenced that the tenants of the Cranston kennels had both reminded her of their existence and had broken in upon a discourse in which she felt capable of spreading herself. "I wish there were no such things."

"Now, aunt, I have always heard that you were a person whom difficulties and opposition stimulated."

Miss Badsworth smiled; it was a phase of her character to which her adherents were used to point with pride when they wanted to get something out of her, consequently she

recognised it as an old friend. "It depends rather whence the difficulties and opposition, as you call them, come."

"I suppose it does. I recollect, as a child, some medicines which one was made to take were much nicer than others. But I call that yonder really nice medicine."

"Lavvy, when I used to come down here for Christmas, or perhaps a little later, I wouldn't have believed I should ever live to hate the thought of hounds and horses."

"I daresay not, auntie; but I think other worries are quite as much to blame. You don't believe in omens, and you don't believe in prophecies, and I don't know that I do much, but when you first aroused me out of my day-dream, or evening dream, or whatever it was, I was thinking of Victor Bickersdyke, my——"

"Lavvy! you don't mean——"

"Mean what, auntie? Oh, no! I was going to say cousin."

"Yes, of course, I know; and your father said he was a good deal in Cornwall."

"Well, I was on the point of saying that I was thinking if after all our efforts our plans went wrong, what Victor would do with this beautiful place. From what I know of him, aunt, I think he would be far more at sea than you could possibly be. I thought in all probability he would make a study of that cedar (some of his pictures are fairly good), and just then I saw the moon glimmer amongst the lower branches and gradually rise up, up, sometimes hidden, sometimes clear and bright, till—look at it now, auntie, throwing our shadows on the path."

Miss Badsworth's eyes were fixed on the girl's upturned face with the moonlight shining full upon it, and bringing out not only the resolute chin, but the corners of the mouth with their upward curve.

"Omen or no omen, auntie, it's my first night here and I shall look upon it as your moon; you going up, up, ever so high, and shedding light all round. Why not? See?"

Miss Badsworth laughed softly.

"It's rather a pretty picture, certainly," she said, partly referring to her niece's words, and partly to the girl herself with the dog, who had resumed his original position on her lap. "I must say, Lavvy, you are just the sort of person to inspire me with confidence; you certainly think lightly of obstacles, I don't know whether it is from lack of experience."

"I expect it is, auntie; but obstacles always appear to me to be intended to rouse our efforts, that is, if they are worth overcoming; if not, I should go round. There is usually some way out."

"That's what Mr. Morgan says."

"Does he? He ought to know."

"Why?"

"Any man who goes as he can in a strange country——" She stopped short.

"I didn't mean that, I meant in business; he it was who found what your father thought was a loophole in that wretched codicil, in fact he thought of you."

Miss Lavvy dropped her pocket-handkerchief and reached over the arm of her chair to pick it up; she felt her colour rise.

"Mind yourself, Johnnie," she said; and then when she had resumed her position and her equanimity, added, "I'm sure it was very clever of him, auntie."

"Well, something had to be done; your father was very strong on the necessity of not giving in without a struggle."

"Just so. Poor Victor!" Miss Lavvy was still uncomfortable enough inwardly to trail the red herring across the line.

Miss Badsworth felt uncomfortable also. From what she had seen of her nephew she certainly did not deem him a very desirable person; apart from his habit of taking more than was good for him, he had assumed a position of armed neutrality. It had been galling to see upon Victor Bickersdyke's face an expression of superiority. Though his manner had been pleasant when he had bidden his uncle and aunt adieu, there had been a sort of "we shall meet

again under different circumstances" expression on his face (and on that occasion he was perfectly sober) which had filled Miss Badsworth with annoyance, not to say panic, such as might be felt by a lordly salmon who finds his progress impeded by the meshes of a net.

"I don't know why you should say 'poor Victor,' Lavvy, one would think he was being kept out of his rights by fraud. Your Uncle Hugo, though he never mentioned the subject of his relations, was well aware of everything that went on; it is simply marvellous to me that, in making arrangements for his successor in the event of my failure, he chose Victor instead of your father. Your uncle was by no means a vindictive person, and I should never have suspected him of attaching any weight to our conversation that night in London. I certainly said I thought I could manage one of his day's work if it came in my way, but I sincerely wish now that I had held my tongue."

Miss Lavvy was silent; she was thinking how easy it is to say we could fill another's lot better than our own, and was racking a fairly shrewd brain for a solution of the mystery.

Miss Badsworth watched her, and a vague suspicion began to take shape in her mind. From her niece's description Dewthorpe must be an out-of-the-way place with probably little society, and Victor Bickersdyke had been for a considerable time in the neighbourhood ostensibly painting pictures; the girl might be ignorant of the failing of the young man, and besides, if this were not the case, how many instances she could recall (and she prided herself on her knowledge of human nature) where infatuation covered a multitude of sins.

"What do you think of Victor, Lavvy?" she asked presently.

Now with all the sedateness of her manner upon occasion, Miss Badsworth the younger, though a dweller for some years in a remote part of Cornwall, had a quick intelligence and keen sense of humour. In a twinkling she divined her aunt's thoughts, and replied accordingly.

"He is a clever young man when he likes to take the trouble to be so; but now I come to think of it, he seems born for better things."

"What do you mean, child?"

"When he talks—I don't know that he is exactly discontented—he leaves the impression that the world has used him very badly. If he had his rights his position would be very different."

"What rights?"

"You must ask him that, auntie. They vary, but at times he gets so depressed that it makes one quite sad to hear him."

"Reaction," thought Miss Badsworth; she had unfortunately met with such cases in her own sex, persons who primed themselves for their work and made the excuse that it was to increase their sphere of usefulness.

"It is very easy to think one's self ill-used if one gives way," she said. "I must say I wasn't impressed with Victor's good qualities."

"No? But you didn't see much of him, auntie. He is a frequent visitor at Dewthorpe."

It was getting late.

"I think we had better go in," Miss Badsworth said, rising from her chair; but she felt it her duty to give her niece a word of warning. Young people were necessarily superficial in their views of character. There was a pause before she asked:—

"Is there anything between you, Lavvy?"

"Whom?"

"You and Victor Bickersdyke."

Lavvy turned her face away, and Miss Badsworth's heart sank as she thought she observed an uneasy movement of her niece's shoulders.

The reply came in a low, uneven voice:—

"Yes, auntie, there is."

"How long has it been—going on?" was the anxious inquiry.

"I hardly know."

"My dear Lavvy, what can your father have been thinking of? That is the worst of men; they are blind, blind except when their own interests are immediately concerned; now I have only known you a few hours, but in that time——"

Her speech was interrupted by a pair of strong soft arms thrown suddenly round her neck.

"Don't blame dad, auntie, you have made a mistake. You asked if there was anything between Victor and me, and I said there was; well, I repeat it, there is a great deal between us."

There was a pause before the last word was whispered in Miss Badsworth's ear—"Whisky!"

Notwithstanding the relief she felt, Miss Badsworth was sorely tempted to shake her niece till her teeth rattled, but the arms still round her neck were firm and strong, so she determined that discretion was superior to valour.

"I am *so* glad," she said instead.

"Do you know, auntie, I was desperately afraid of you as measured by report. I expected all sorts of terrible things, and instead of that you are the most lovable person, except dad, that I ever met; but we mustn't forget that we have to stand up to our guns."

For reply Miss Badsworth pinched her niece's cheek. She didn't quite take in at first the meaning of the concluding words, but she had a vague idea that her brother's daughter had a determination as strong or stronger than her own. Taken altogether it was a comfort to find one upon whom she could rely with confidence.

Miss Lavvy, in a white wrapper bedecked with countless tiny frills, leaned out of her window to have one more look at the moon. For a few moments her thoughts were occupied with her aunt, and they speedily came to the conclusion that "advanced women" as a genus must be subdivided into varying species. She had hoped to have had simply to obey orders, but now she was doubtful. It followed that her

own position would come up for review. "What *will* he think, Johnnie?" she said to the terrier. Naturally there was no reply, so that like Sisera's mother she had to answer herself. "What does it matter *what* he thinks?" It was defiant, but not entirely satisfactory, so she went to bed.

CHAPTER XV.

The clock over the stables was striking seven as Miss Lavvy emerged from the hall door and paused to take in the surroundings. Everything was on a larger and more liberal scale than that to which her eyes had been accustomed at Dewthorpe; the trees were grander and bore no traces of a battle for existence; the crops of grass were heavier, and the shorthorn cattle lacked the rich Devon brown that she loved. The air was fresh enough, but (perhaps it was fancy) there seemed an absence of the crisp, invigorating ingredients imparted by sea or moorland, or both, which belonged to what she called her native land.

Still it was a typical June morning, everything from the bees in the lime trees to the rabbits skipping about the neighbouring clumps seemed glad to be alive.

But Miss Lavvy was bent upon the first steps towards taking up the reins of responsibility, so she passed quickly on, content to take things as she found them, and "the Reformer" trotted at her heels.

There was no need to ask her way to the kennels. More than once her toilet had been disturbed by the necessity of leaning out of the window to listen to the exhilarating sound of hound voices.

Joe Summers, in his white kennel coat, had long since made his first tour of inspection. He was a man of strict punctuality, consequently his subordinates were punctual too.

"With hounds things must be done regular," he was wont to say, so that everything was as spick and span as a hospital ward.

At the present moment he was approaching the corner of

one of the buildings, pondering many things in his mind. For years he had esteemed himself responsible, but it was only now, under the present condition of affairs, that responsibility assumed its full weight. There was no master to fall back upon, and on occasions secretly to blame if errors of judgment were shown. "Whatever would things come to?" he asked himself. The answer came unexpectedly in the form of a young lady, clad in a serviceable tweed costume with a tweed cap upon her head, who met him face to face round the corner. Two brown eyes satisfied themselves of his identity in a moment, and a pleasant voice said:—

"Good morning, Mr. Summers."

"Mornin', mi—ma'am," the old man replied, with the customary upward movement of his right hand, wondering who his visitor might be.

"If you will allow me, I should like to see your hounds," Lavvy said.

The power of life and death must be a grave responsibility, but ambitious people have always appeared to like the attribute, if not the exercise, of the power.

At all events the form of Miss Lavvy's request appealed to Joe Summers. Of course he didn't know that Charles Badsworth had cautioned his daughter to be careful how she dealt with the old man, who was inclined to be crusty.

"Very well, ma'am," he said, turning and leading the way. A broken thigh, which had incapacitated him as a horseman, caused him to limp as he walked.

An authoritative word quelled a clamour which arose when Joe and his visitor looked through the bars of the first kennel yard; a few more sent the occupants, with the exception of one hound, to the benches, from whence anxious or offended eyes were fixed upon the kennel railings and the unfamiliar figure beyond. The one hound who stood on the flags grumbled forth menacing growls.

"What's that hound's name, Mr. Summers? He seems an independent sort of boy," Lavvy asked.

"Rollicker. Kennel up, Rollicker."

Though Miss Lavvy was accustomed to something very much smaller, hound shows and puppy shows, to which she had accompanied her father, together with his own personal views of what made a hound and what did not, had given her a fair insight into points and probabilities. Moreover, when in doubt she knew how to hold her tongue.

"Third or fourth season?" she asked.

Summers turned quickly to observe his questioner. She was still looking at the hound, though perfectly aware of the effect of her question.

"Fifth, more's the pity, but"—curiosity getting the better of his usual laconic manner—"how did you know, ma'am?"

"I was looking at his feet." Then, taking advantage of the surprise on the old man's face, "Lend me one of your kennel coats, Mr. Summers, and let us go in and look at them separately".

She took down a whip from the kennel door, and that finished Summers off; he led the way towards the boiling house, averting his head to conceal his surprise, and from a peg in a neighbouring room took down a clean linen coat and held it out without a word for Lavvy to insert her arms.

"A little long in the sleeves," she said, laughing, as she turned up the cuffs, "but a very good fit otherwise."

Summers wondered that he had lived to see the day which could shine on a woman in a kennel coat, but he unbent somewhat under the sunny influence of his companion.

Leaving "the Reformer" in charge of a glove, the two proceeded to the kennel.

As Summers said to his wife later in the day: "She was no more afraid than I was, and I'm blessed if she didn't make friends with Rollicker and Vagrant first going off; she've a wonderful memory for names".

To be asked pertinent questions, and hear sensible remarks from a woman where hounds were concerned might not have surprised Miss Badsworth, but it did surprise Joe Summers, and unwittingly he found himself conversing as

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if to one both competent to judge and whose remarks were frequently worthy of acceptation. It took no persuasion to induce the old man to have the lot out in the paddock.

"I should like to see whether I could pick some of them out by name," Lavvy had said when the inspection of both packs upon the flags was over; so Ned Barlow was summoned, and one by one the forty couples (the late master had always kept enough for three days a week) were called forth and gathered in the paddock.

"What sort of country is it?" Lavvy asked when they had walked slowly about discussing merits.

Summers leaned against the railings and took up his parable.

"It's like most other places, ma'am, there's good scenting and bad scenting. This side it's mostly good, and scent for the most part holds well, but over Ashley way it's light land and apt to be catchy or worse." He launched into reminiscences, and Lavvy stood and listened, looking at the hounds strolling around or rolling on the grass the while.

"Now, I'll draft a pack for the Ashley side," she said presently, during a pause.

Summers laughed, actually laughed, but silently.

"You call them through that gate as I name them or point them out," Lavvy said.

"A pretty mess you'll make of it," Summers thought; however he opened the gate and waited whilst the girl walked slowly around making her choice.

"Wayward," she called to him, and he surreptitiously slapped his thigh as he repeated the name.

"Launcelot, Sempstress, the badger-pied hound on the outside——"

"Wary," Summers said.

"Well, Wary; my old friend Rollicker; is it Waverer or Wayfarer that black and tan yonder?"

"Waverer," Summers replied.

When eight couples had been drafted, Lavvy walked to

the gate, leant upon it, and smiled at Summers' quaint countenance.

"I daresay I am all wrong, but I think with that lot to begin with, one might get on."

Summers looked at the hounds and then looked at the girl.

"But you ain't wrong, you're about right," he said, lifting his hat and scratching the back of his head. "Why did you pick 'em?"

"They are more inclined to be throaty than the rest, and they ought to have better noses in consequence."

"That's what I've told the Squire scores of times; what you gains in pace you loses in nose, not but what these are fast enough to gallop any horse that was ever foaled to a standstill, provided they get a chance."

"Do they ride very hard up here?" Lavvy asked.

"A few does, and many don't. There's the doctor from Castleton, Captain Littleton, when he's down here, and one or two farmers, they've spoilt more sport in their time than fifty of the rest, and never know nothing about it either."

"It must be very annoying. What did you use to do?"

"*I* didn't do nothing, I couldn't; but the master he used to talk to them."

"And what am I to do, Summers?"

"You, mi—ma'am?" His face was a study, but Lavvy looked at him gravely.

"I'm going to hunt the hounds, Summers. Is it a very difficult thing to do?"

"That just depends," he said doubtfully.

"*You* must have begun somewhen, I suppose."

"Yes, ma'am, I begun, but then I'd whipped-in for five years before I hunted Squire Rayton's harriers. To my thinking harriers is a good school; a clever Jack hare takes some catchin'."

"And you don't think I shall get on without that apprenticeship?"

Summers began to feel a considerable amount of respect for this young lady who had shown unexpected knowledge on

several points of hound lore; but a woman to hunt hounds! It went so entirely against the grain that the old huntsman didn't hesitate to express his opinion.

"I don't, and that's plain, ma'am."

"Then it's just fortunate I *have* served it," she said gravely. "I've whipped-in for *six* years and hunted the harriers too, and, what's more, I've caught a fox, Summers."

"You did!" the old man exclaimed. "Well, there, I've been wondering who you might be."

"I daresay, but Ned over yonder isn't wondering."

"Ned never says nothin'; he's a good, quiet chap."

"And I don't fancy you talk, Summers. Well, you remember that, according to the Will, Lavinia Badsworth has to hunt the hounds."

"And how she's goin' to do it, and afeared of them as ever she can be, I don't know," Summers said.

"But she isn't going to."

"Then she'll lose the money and the place, and that there——"

"Never mind him, Summers. The Will says Lavinia Badsworth, and that is my name too."

"And you are Mr. Charles's daughter?" Summers exclaimed, coming out of his shell. "Then that's why you knows about hounds, and——"

"Yes, Summers, that's it."

"Well, I've heard Ned say that you was terrible handy——"

Lavvy held up her hand.

"I thought Ned didn't talk," she said with a smile.

"Oh, Ned can pass an opinion when he's asked."

They walked back to the kennels with the hounds clustering round, and Ned following in the rear.

"I shall worry your life out, Summers," Lavvy said. "I have to learn the country, and the coverts, and the hounds; it's a big job."

"'Pon my word, if you goes at it like that, and sticks to it, maybe you'll master it."

"I hope so, in a way; but you never told me what I should do when the hounds are over-ridden."

"Take 'em home, miss"—the title came out at last—"take 'em home. *You* can, I couldn't."

. . . . . .

When the hounds were back in their kennels and Lavvy had restored the kennel coat to its peg, Summers asked:—

"Excuse me, miss, when you caught that fox, what did you do with him?"

"Broke him up," Lavvy replied, stooping apparently to tie a shoe-string.

"And how did you do it—if I may make so bold?"

Lavvy ran her fingers round Johnnie's neck.

"So," she said. "Turn back the skin, and sever the vertebræ at base of skull—brush so—taking Johnnie's tail in her hand. Pads of course at the joints."

Summers smiled, but all he said was "Don't forget to keep your knife sharp, miss".

. . . . . .

Twice during his breakfast Joseph Summers chuckled quietly to himself.

So unusual was the proceeding that at the second exhibition of the phenomenon his wife's curiosity was aroused.

"What's the matter, Joe?" she asked.

"Nothing's the matter that I know of," he replied. "I've been talking to the new huntsman."

"Well?" Mrs. Summer's query came in a tone which evidenced surprise that so important a matter from her husband's point of view should be coupled with signs of levity.

Joe felt more than half inclined to share his information with his wife. Matters were so far out of the common line of events that they caused considerable stress upon his powers of self-control, but Joe shared with the Red Indian the idea that the display of astonishment was detrimental to dignity, and womenfolk would talk, so he said:—

"Comical things happens, that's all," and then he relapsed into the silence of the Sphinx.

CHAPTER XVI.

Miss Badsworth was as punctual as a well-regulated town clock. She seated herself at the breakfast table almost as soon as the gong sounded. The cares of ownership had preyed upon her, and more than once in the night she had awakened under a nightmare of responsibility. The bright sunshine of the June morning made matters appear more cheerful, but the heap of correspondence, though it was chiefly composed of answers to her advertisement for a secretary, brought back the stern realities of her position.

She selected a letter from Mrs. Dickinson as an accompaniment to her tea and toast. As far as peace and repose went she had better have left it alone, as a man would have done. Mrs. Dickinson ventured to rebuke Miss Badsworth for failing to support the Humanitarian Society; she reported that difficulties were arising in the working of the Society for taking over the Responsibility of Parents which Miss Badsworth had temporarily handed over during her absence. Parents who had availed themselves of the society did not belong to a very desirable class, and some of them were already seeking compensation. It was impossible to find any one to take up the Persian History Scholarships, and consequently things were getting into a muddle. Would she, Miss Badsworth, speak at a meeting of the Servant Girls' Athletic Association, and would she——

Miss Badsworth put down the letter with a certain tendency towards despair, and with her brother's words ringing in her ears, "People were made to do work and not manufacture it," just as her niece entered, holding the door for a moment to permit the passage of Johnnie.

"Good morning, auntie, I am afraid I am a little late," she said, advancing briskly and bestowing a kiss upon Miss Badsworth.

"I daresay you were tired, my dear; it's a long journey from Cornwall."

"I am thankful to say I rarely get tired," Lavvy replied, taking her seat and helping herself. "I don't mean to say I don't often have enough for one day, but a little rest puts me right. You look worried, auntie; is anything the matter?"

Miss Badsworth glanced at the heap of correspondence and allowed her eyes to rest upon Mrs. Dickinson's open letter.

"Nothing to signify," she replied; "only everything seems to come at the same time."

"Are those more secretaries?" Lavvy asked, nodding towards the unopened missives. "If so, we can soon dispose of them if you have a good big waste-paper basket. I don't see why in about three days we shouldn't have everything here in working order."

"Three days!" Miss Badsworth exclaimed despairingly.

"Yes, three days. One for the kennels and stables, one for the farm, and the third for gardens and estate generally. You were saying you wanted to go to town; you would be able to manage it easily next week."

"Do you think so, my dear? I have been obliged to cancel some of my engagements, but there are enough left to occupy the whole of July."

"Yes? Are they very important, auntie?"

Miss Badsworth paused and drummed on the table with her fingers before she replied:—

"The various projects I have taken up are not, as yet, self-supporting. In order to be of practical use, and break through the bonds of custom and prejudice, they require both support and perseverance. It is not very easy to make people understand that for centuries they have been slaves to custom; that, for instance, women can never assert their independence without striking out a line of their own."

"Do you mean in clothes, auntie?"

"Well, yes, my dear, clothes and other things."

"What sort of independence do they want, auntie? Independence of what?"

"It is rather difficult to define it in a few words, Lavvy. It has been the custom for women to take a secondary position for such a length of time, that the suggestion that they are adapted to better things equally with men is apt to be received with scoffs and jeers."

Miss Lavvy smiled into the apricot jam-pot, but said nothing.

"The popular mind has to be educated up to recognise the fact," Miss Badsworth went on.

"And how do you propose to do it, auntie?"

"By education, my dear; by gradually accustoming the public mind to recognise woman's worth."

"But the value of a coin depends upon what sum of money it represents, does it not, auntie? Isn't the public mind guided by that circumstance?"

"I don't understand you, Lavvy."

"There are many things which a man can do better than a woman, and there are many things which a woman can do better than a man. It's a mere matter of comparison, but I'm afraid there are more men who could do woman's work than there are women who could do man's work."

"I don't agree with you at all, my dear," Miss Badsworth said, moving a little uneasily.

"Well, take the case of a tailor-made costume, auntie. Why do we go to a man when it is woman's work?"

"My dear, it's a matter of cut and the pressing of seams."

Miss Lavvy laughed. "Just so, aunt; and you, the champion of woman's superiority, mean to tell me that in a matter of scissors and goose-irons a woman cannot equal a man. If a man can learn to be a cutter, what is there to hinder a woman doing the same? It seems to me that the fancy or prejudice, or whatever it is, is on the woman's side."

"My dear Lavvy, I'm afraid you know nothing about the matter," Miss Badsworth said. Her faith in her principles was a little shaken.

"I daresay not, auntie, but unfortunately it has to be learnt. It seems to me that you, and I, as your assistant and secretary, form a case in point. Here we are set down to men's work through no choice of our own, and what is more we have to get through with it, and, as you say, 'educate the public mind to recognise woman's worth'. I don't know what you think of it, but to me it appears a difficult job."

"I quite agree with you, Lavvy. I would gladly give up my share."

"I don't think you would, auntie; I cannot believe you would shirk a responsibility. Theory and practice are two different things, and it's only natural that we should think anything better than that which we have to do. Don't let us give in almost before we are started."

"I'm not inclined to give in, Lavvy; but it's all so strange, so different from anything to which I have been accustomed."

"It's only man's work in woman's hands, after all, auntie," Lavvy said, laughing; but she rose, went behind Miss Badsworth's chair, put her arms under her aunt's chin, raised her face and kissed her.

Miss Badsworth in turn smiled as she looked up into the steady brown eyes.

"Where are we to begin, Lavvy?"

"The beginning is the best place, auntie, with most things, but, unfortunately, we are plumped down in the middle in this case, and have to carry on our work according to accepted ideas, and, if the truth be told, I fear we neither of us know how to do it. What to most men, brought up in the country, would be a simple matter of detail, is to us a novelty. It's like being set down to play Chopin with only a smattering of scales and exercises. We may have an idea of what the results ought to be, but the practical part of

the work which should produce those results is more or less a sealed book; but there is only one thing certain, and that is we have got to do it."

Miss Badsworth sighed.

"I feel quite despondent about it at times, Lavvy. What do you propose?"

"May I say just what I think, auntie?"

"Of course, child."

"Then, if I were in your place, I should write to your correspondent," nodding towards the letter, "and tell her plainly she must carry on that work, whatever it is, you giving just as much reason as you see fit. I wouldn't risk the danger of the two stools if I were you."

"But you don't know what that entails, Lavvy. You must remember I have had my various schemes very much at heart, and have been the mainspring of many of them; to go back and leave them in the lurch would never do."

"Is there any one of them of vital importance, auntie? Will the world be very much the worse if they are in abeyance for, say, a year?"

For reply Miss Badsworth handed Mrs. Dickinson's letter to her niece, and watched her face as she read it. At the expense of considerable effort Lavvy showed no outward or visible sign of her feelings.

"What sort of person is *Mr.* Dickinson?" was the question which accompanied the return of the letter.

It was not what Miss Badsworth expected, but she had a vivid recollection of having expressed pity for that harmless individual.

"A quiet, studious, hard-working little man, my dear. Why do you ask?"

"I rather pity him, auntie, that is all."

Miss Badsworth was conscious of having frequently done the same thing.

"Father has had some correspondence with the secretary of the Humanitarian Society. I remember he concluded with a postscript recommending him not to write nonsense.

I tried to get him to scratch it out, but he wouldn't. I daresay scholarships in Persian History might be useful. Do you know any Persian, auntie?"

"My dear, Lady Theodosia Booker foisted that on to me. She is an antiquary and a busy woman."

"Then why not write to her and tell her you are unable to carry out her plan? I suppose she has one. Surely it cannot be a good thing to undervalue the responsibility of parents by taking it off their hands."

"It is not so much the discounting their responsibilities that is aimed at as getting hold of the children and inculcating proper ideas into their minds," Miss Badsworth said.

"I see, and sending them out to leaven the lump, and work on the compound interest principle. I should draw my pen through that, auntie. Tell me, what is the object of the Servant Girls' Athletic Association? They seem strong enough to smash up a kitchen range in a week as it is, at least in Cornwall they are."

"Air and rational exercise, my dear," Miss Badsworth said half-heartedly.

"They have their bicycles and days out, better food than they would get at home, why make them imagine that being paid for what they do, or more often don't do, is ignominious slavery? I can't say much about rational dress, auntie, I confess I don't *like* it, and it's not becoming, but as I have thrown in my lot with you, and intend to see you through your trouble, I shall have to go beyond it in the matter of costume."

"How do you mean, Lavvy?"

"You see if I hunt the hounds for a month, I shall have to know them and they must know me. There will be the exercising and the cub-hunting, auntie; it means a red coat, and—the rest."

"My dear Lavvy!"

The girl leaned back in her chair and laughed; the expression on her aunt's face was too comical for words.

"How else did you think it could be done, auntie?" she

asked presently. "As I said just now, I don't like it at all, *that* part of it at least, but there is no other way that I can see. It will be hard enough work without handicapping myself with a skirt; out of perversity it will probably pour with rain every hunting day, and I cannot go home just when I like."

It suddenly dawned upon Miss Badsworth that her niece was about to undergo a considerable amount of self-sacrifice, and she found herself wondering what the country-side generally would say. Of course, according to all her theories, this fact should not have entered into her calculations, it should have been relegated to the back attic, labelled "prejudice," but when it came to play the practical part of Balaam's angel and stand in the way, there was nothing for it but to recognise it as a fact. She looked at her niece, who avoided scrutiny by providing Johnnie with bread and milk. People who pride themselves upon reading character, which often takes the form of failing to observe what exists and imagining that which does not, are frequently at a loss to recognise straightforward honesty of purpose. To be considered shrewd one has to suspect almost everything, which too often results in the condemnation of the innocent and permitting the offender to go scot free. One edges away from the rough-looking coster in a crowd, and stands confidingly beside the mild curate with the high all-round collar; it is not until the latter has picked one's pocket that one learns that appearances of evil are often as unreliable as appearances of good.

"We must begin somewhere, Lavvy," Miss Badsworth said, watching "the Reformer" execute various feats before he received his food.

"Just so, auntie."

"I like to get the disagreeable done first, and I look upon those horrible kennels as the chief infliction; we will go down there."

"They constitute a necessary evil under the present condition of things," Lavvy said, looking up with a smile.

"I suppose so," her aunt replied with a sigh.

"Auntie, I've spent two hours there this morning; I have seen every hound, and Summers and I have agreed upon the necessary draft. Everything is in tip-top order."

"My dear child! You have? Two hours! I thought you were resting in your bed."

"Two classes of people cannot afford to lie in bed, auntie, dairymaids and huntsmen — no doubt there are many others. I've been one of the former for years, and now I'm to be one of the latter. You won't mind the stables, will you?"

Miss Badsworth's expression of worry and anxiety died away and was replaced by a smile; for the first time since she had entered upon her unsought duties the sense of humour returned.

"If you don't look any more like a huntsman than you do like a dairymaid you won't fill the bill very well, Lavvy."

"I am afraid, auntie, you judge by appearances. Wait until I have had time to study Joseph Summers; I really believe I looked rather like him in his white kennel coat."

Whatever Miss Badsworth thought she certainly took heart of grace from her niece's energetic character, and Mrs. Dickinson received a letter which filled her with both indignation and anxiety.

CHAPTER XVII.

Of course it was business which brought Mr. John Morgan over, two days later, to call at Cranston, though perhaps it did not account for his disappointment when, on being ushered into Miss Badsworth's presence, he found her alone.

Nevertheless, he did not fail to notice that that lady was evidently more satisfied with her surroundings. That Miss Lavvy had arrived he gathered from Miss Badsworth's use of the plural "we" in describing certain arrangements. Lavvy had seen a horseman riding leisurely up the drive with the reins on his horse's neck, and had promptly retired, as is frequently the female use when rather inclined to cultivate a certain person's acquaintance.

"Mr. Morgan must be an assistant, not a hindrance," was the conclusion to which the young lady had come, and having laid down that point clearly and decisively troubled herself no more about it, but went forth to try and ascertain by personal inspection why more than double the number of cows yielded less than double the amount of butter produced at Dewthorpe.

Miss Badsworth being the properly constituted authority at Cranston, it was not for her niece to do more than gather statistics and make a report. The woman in charge of the dairy was talkative enough, and glad of the opportunity of a gossip. With no other ground to go upon beyond a well-fitting frock, Lavvy was relegated to the category of a town lady, and greater freedom of speech was consequently indulged in.

A little dissimulation and a few innocent questions elicited

the frequently occurring fact that opposition claims of calves and pigs detracted from the butter output, but Lavvy felt a sense of relief in observing that, however shrewd her uncle might have been, he had been rather behind the times in his dairy appliances. So it happened that on her way back to the house she seated herself beneath a wych-elm and, producing her note-book, jotted down the items of intelligence she had gleaned for her aunt's benefit. With the butt of her pencil pressed against her lips, and her eyes fixed unseeingly upon Johnnie spread luxuriously in the sunshine, she made mental calculations, and so engrossed did she become that the sound of a horse's footfall on the grass and the creaking of a saddle did not attract her attention until, with a sudden action, "the Reformer" sat erect.

When your back is to a tree, and that tree intervenes between you and an approaching horseman, and you happen to know who the newcomer is, there is much opportunity for effecting composure even if startled out of an abstruse mathematical problem.

Lavvy was as cool and collected as ever she had been in her life when Jack Morgan pulled up his cob with seeming surprise at the unexpected meeting, which, considering he had spotted the white form of his namesake at least a minute before, did him credit.

"Good morning, Miss Badsworth," he exclaimed, jumping to the ground. "Your aunt told me you had arrived and had gone to work already. Don't get up, it will be easier for both of us if I sit down."

So he did, and Lavvy returned his greeting with as much calmness as the young man himself displayed.

"And what do you think of it? It's a change from Cornwall, isn't it?" Jack asked.

"Well, yes," was the reply. "I am not surprised you thought our country strange, Mr. Morgan, but I wish the change of air and change of scene were the only changes."

"That I can understand; it's an extraordinary muddle. Miss Badsworth, however, seems to grasp the situation now."

There was a slight stress upon the last word which Lavvy understood but chose to ignore.

"I think Aunt Lavinia will give up her London work for the present, and then she will have more time. It is a dreadful handful at first; she does not appear to be at home in the country, but she is quite different from what I expected."

"Might I ask what you did expect?"

"Yes, you certainly may ask, but I hardly think I can answer the question. I had only newspaper reports of meetings to go upon. I suppose I thought Aunt Lavinia would be a hard, mannish, bustling sort of person, very differently dressed from what she is, who would have thought nothing of being called upon to command an army, or a 'fleet in being,' or suddenly becoming Prime Minister; instead of which she is—a dear, just what you said she was, Mr. Morgan."

"Surely I never presumed to say she was 'a dear'. If I recollect rightly"—and he felt pleased that Lavvy should recall his opinion—"I said she was 'a good sort'."

"Did you? Well, it means much the same thing."

Lavvy made an attempt to be more distant, which failed signally. Jack was not the sort of person to be easily snubbed or put off, and the good-humoured smile which Lavvy took in with a side glance assured her that if she told him to go, which she had no intention of doing, he would somehow turn the mandate into an invitation to remain.

"Now, Mr. Morgan, I want you to be serious," she said.

"Serious! was I ever more serious in my life?" he exclaimed.

"That I cannot tell you, as we are comparative strangers."

"Well, never mind. We have broken up a fox together on the wild and trackless Cornish moor, and that is something. One cannot fancy people being strangers who have buffeted the aggressive ocean on a raft together; and, barring the danger, there was something akin to that in what

we did, and I recollect I was almost as thirsty as I should have been under the other conditions. That jug of cider which your father produced when we got back kept up the analogy of the kind treatment by the rescuing crew. I felt quite ready to subscribe to the gold watch for the captain, which is the proper thing, I believe. Strangers or no strangers we have got to row in the same boat which your good uncle built from some inscrutable design of his own."

"Mr. Morgan, I firmly believe there must be another Will."

"I only wish there were, and that we could find it; but Bailey and I searched high and low. What is your reason for thinking that one exists, Miss Badsworth?"

"The more I look at Uncle Hugo's picture, the more like he seems to be to my father. Dad is just the person who would play Aunt Lavinia a trick, and he didn't know her as well as Uncle Hugo did. Even after my short acquaintance with auntie I can see that most of her schemes are theoretical. Instead of being strong-minded she is easily influenced, and so good-natured that she can be readily imposed upon by other people with views, who have everything to gain and nothing to risk. But then dad would never have done anything without guarding against a disastrous result, and I cannot imagine Uncle Hugo not doing so either."

"I confess I have been sorely puzzled," Jack said, leaning back against the tree so as to have a good view of his companion's face, "but, as a matter of fact, there is the Will and no other, and the worst of it is the requirements must be carried out. I am dreadfully sorry you should be called upon to do what falls to your lot, but Miss Badsworth spoke the truth when she said she was utterly incapable of doing it."

"Poor auntie! She gets on first-rate with the humans, but she is terribly afraid of the hounds, but I was and am far more afraid of Joe Summers."

"I gather from that you have interviewed him?"

"Yes."

"And had no difficulty in getting round him? He is a nice old chap is Summers. How did you manage it?"

Lavvy laughed. "How did Delilah get round Samson?" she asked.

"But his hair is so short already," Jack objected.

"I don't think, Mr. Morgan, you should be so frivolous," with mock gravity.

"Excuse me, you introduced the scriptural parallel."

"I expect that there is little that Summers doesn't know about hounds and hunting, but, thanks to dad's tips, I knew enough not to ask foolish questions. I borrowed a kennel coat, Mr. Morgan, and I have an idea that in his astonishment the old man forgot to be critical."

Jack laughed aloud. "You will do first-rate, Miss Badsworth," he exclaimed.

"Because I wore a kennel coat? You forget the exercising, the cub-hunting, and all the preliminary learning of the country and coverts."

"No, I don't; but I will tell you what, Miss Badsworth, I know every yard, and if I can be of any service——"

"Thanks; it's very good of you," Lavvy said, interrupting his transparent enthusiasm. "You see as master, or rather mistress, Aunt Lavinia will no doubt be glad of your escort."

"Yes-s, to be sure," Jack replied in a somewhat altered tone. "She will, of course, want to know something of the country to be drawn and the various fixtures, but only the *huntsman* will require to know the shape of the coverts, and how and where to get away. We will go round with your aunt to see the farmers and landowners."

It was Lavvy's turn to laugh, but any immediate reply was obviated by Jack's cob deciding that a roll upon the grass would be beneficial. To save the saddle-tree a dash had to be made to frustrate the attempt. Miss Lavvy rose too, and no doubt that was why Jack Morgan jobbed the cob's mouth.

"You have only to command me at any time," he remarked with outstretched hand, seeing that the young lady

was bent on departing. "I suppose you know," he added, "that your cousin, Mr. Bickersdyke, has taken a cottage at Allington. I presume he is going to watch events."

"Has he? Well, let him," Lavvy replied; and Jack saw a look of determination upon the girl's face which made it, he thought, more charming than ever. It was evident that Miss Badsworth did not think very highly of her cousin, a fact which Jack grasped with some satisfaction.

"Is there anything more I can do for you?" he asked.

"You haven't done much, have you?"

"No, by Jove, I haven't, but—I should like to."

He was a very pleasant young man and Lavvy quite understood his meaning. She felt rather loath to shock him, but business was business. Undoubtedly she was a Badsworth; when she undertook anything she liked to carry it through. Nevertheless she hesitated before she made what she thought would be a plunge into the prejudices of this young man.

"Say the word," he said, watching her face with amusement.

"Could you lend me an old red coat? the more weather-stained the better," she asked.

His face was a study as for a moment his jaw dropped in astonishment.

"A—what?" he asked.

There was a little lump in Lavvy's throat, and she cleared it before she explained with the question: "I cannot go exercising, and eventually cub-hunting, in a brand new coat, can I?"

"I—suppose not," he replied with his thoughts wandering.

Lavvy could not recall such a sense of humiliation at any previous period of her life as that which swept over her at that moment. Like many other people similarly situated she was under the impression that she didn't care; now she found she did. But the Badsworth determination or obstinacy, or what you like to call it, came to her aid.

"You evidently have not weighed the exigencies of the

case, Mr. Morgan," she said with an attempt at dignity which the distress on her face discounted. "I have made what you no doubt consider an unwarrantable request; you offered to assist me, or I should not have made it. As the sole executor of my uncle's Will you are necessarily aware of its provisions. I am an outsider who am called in to assist in carrying out those requirements, and I am going to try to do it. I retract my request. Good morning!"

Lavvy bestowed a dignified bow on the astonished Jack Morgan, and left him standing beside his cob, watching her retreating figure.

Miss Lavvy was not a young lady given to tears without just cause, yet never had she been nearer them than at the present moment. Humiliation, vexation, or some other ation, set to work at moral fisticuffs within her, and, as was natural, Jack Morgan, though he had said little or nothing, bore the blame.

There was no doubt that a promising alliance, offensive and defensive, was on the verge of ruin. Well, it was not the first, if history is to be credited, which had been jeopardised by a misunderstanding.

It so happened, however, that "the Reformer," an unbiassed spectator, came to the rescue. To him there were always possibilities when a man, with or without a horse, was upon the scene; but like a wise and prudent dog, when there was no visible cause for activity, he was content to await developments, and when the full benefits of June sunshine, tempered by the proximity of grateful shade, were present, he seemed to be aware that there was no immediate call for hurry. True, his mistress had risen and was walking away with dignified steps, but the man with the horse remained *in statu quo ante*. Consequently with head on one side he considered the matter.

Jack Morgan recovered instantly from his surprise; "the Reformer's" expression of doubt recalled much; but why it should have been associated with a certain black satin blouse, slashed with rose-colour, and a trailing skirt, cannot

be stated. The brilliant sunshine and the grateful shade of the wych-elm could have had nothing to do with it; possibly the mention of a weather-stained red coat may by contrast have furnished the connection.

At all events Jack smiled as though, having recovered from his surprise, the facts of the case had dawned upon him.

"Miss Badsworth!" he called after the retreating lady, "you have forgotten your dog!"

Had Lavvy been versed in the usages of young ladies who can reckon their flirtations by hundreds, of course she would have walked straight on and paid no heed to a remark of that nature; but the air of Cornwall no doubt stimulates honesty of purpose as well as other things, so she turned round to see Jack Morgan walking slowly towards her leading his cob, and then she stopped and awaited him.

Had he been a woman, Jack would have commenced speaking at a distance, pitching his voice up so that his meaning was unintelligible unless the words were repeated; being a man, he came quite close before he said:—

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Miss Badsworth, if I have unwittingly offended you. It was my obtuseness, of course, which could not grasp the reason for your request, which I hope you will allow was rather startling."

His face was grave, but there was an unmistakable twinkle in his eyes. Lavvy coloured, and for a moment contemplated a snub.

Jack must have seen the impending blow, for he exclaimed:—

"Don't be angry with me if I am rather dense! You were right, I had not grasped the full requirements of the case."

No doubt the wise man was right when he said "A soft answer turneth away wrath". It certainly does in a case where the voice is pleasant and a smile accompanies it.

Lavvy did the best thing she could have done—she laughed.

"I daresay it was an odd request, Mr. Morgan. I must have been engrossed in my 'private theatricals,' for it comes to that, only they will be rather public. When in a play the war-worn, long-lost lover returns, covered with wounds and glory, it is such a pity to produce him in a brand new uniform. Now I think of it, you probably never had such a question put to you before."

"Oh, I have indeed, but not by a lady, you know. There is a certain old man who periodically——"

"Now you are laughing at me, Mr. Morgan."

"Not in the least, but you will understand it was not the request so much as the petitioner. Hadn't we better get out of the sun?"

If Jack Morgan preserved any revulsion of feeling whilst Lavvy explained her views of the necessity of the case, it was only temporary. So innocent was the girl, and so entirely wrapped up in securing Miss Badsworth's claim, that in a quarter of an hour his prejudices collapsed, and he found himself entering into certain details as matters of necessity, and recalling what Charles Badsworth had said to his sister.

"Oh, I wish it were Cornwall!" Lavvy exclaimed. "I know I shall disgust everybody, myself included, but it's the 'only way out,' as I think you said, Mr. Morgan. I have promised auntie, and I am going through with it."

"You won't disgust everybody, anyway," Jack replied (he was probably speaking for himself). "I think I have the very coat you want, long, such as hunt servants wear; it has seen plenty of rough weather."

Lavvy hated herself for colouring as she said "Thanks!"

This time they parted in peace and with some contentment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK MORGAN rode slowly homewards, taking a route which passed the kennels.

Women are credited with superior gifts of curiosity, perhaps justly; be that as it may, Jack had a lurking desire to hear what Joe Summers thought of the turn of events.

If Summers had his prejudices he showed the other side of his humanity by a regard for certain of his fellow-men. A sportsman was an object of respect, but the necessary qualifications were calculated according to a high standard, and Mr. Morgan had passed the ordeal. Summers had known him from a boy, and would have summed him up as one who "was mostly in the right place, rarely in the wrong, and could give an account of what hounds had done".

"Never had a finer lot of whelps, Mr. Morgan," he said, when Jack had supplemented his greeting by an inquiry in that direction. "You just come and look at them. Old Constant's are the best to my mind; they are pictures, but I'd like to hear what you think."

So they went together, and much wisdom was dispensed, and Jack had no qualms of conscience when he confirmed the old man's opinion of Constant's progeny.

"Named them yet?" he asked.

"Yes, they are named right enough—Cannibal, Chartreuse, Corsican, Coster, and Constancy."

He pointed them out successively.

"And Constancy is the pick of the basket," Jack said. "I suppose Miss Badsworth has been down to see them."

"Well, she have and she haven't," was the enigmatical reply.

"I thought she might have named the whelps."

"Well, she did and she didn't; not what you mean, sir."

"How's that Summers? It sounds odd."

"Lor', and it is odd. I've been along of hounds for years and it's the oddest thing I've met yet; but I daresay you knows, Mr. Morgan."

"It depends on what you allude to. I know Miss Badsworth has got to handle them by-and-by."

"Do you know *which?*" Joe ventured, after looking carefully round.

Jack failed to preserve his gravity. "I can make a guess," he said. "How does she shape?"

Joe Summers walked in silence till he was at some distance from the buildings, then he stopped and turned to his companion.

"She've less to learn than some."

"Well, that's a good hearing."

"'Tis; she came down a few mornings ago for the first time, put on a kennel coat and went over the lot, and drafted a pack for the far side of the country when I told her 'twas bad scenting betimes. She tells me she's whipped-in for several seasons, and harriers is a good school. Hounds takes wonderful to her; she's got the right way with 'em. She's here at seven regular as the clock; but of course I tell her foxhounds ain't harriers."

"Miss Badsworth will be pretty quick, Summers; and she goes first-rate in a country all banks and walls. I've seen her kill her fox, too!"

"You have, Mr. Morgan!"

Jack gave a graphic account of his day in Cornwall, and Summers listened attentively.

"Of course there was nothing to stop 'em," he remarked meditatively.

"Nothing but heather and bogs and pits and holes. I give you my word I would sooner cross this country any day; you do know what you are about. I can tell you you have got to keep your eyes open down there, though it looks plain sailing enough."

"I wish Mr. Charles had been put on to the job; he's a sportsman and no mistake—just like the poor master," Summers said reflectively.

"But he *wasn't;* that's just where the pinch comes, Summers. What we have to do is the best we can."

"I ain't denying that the young lady's a chip of the right block, and I wouldn't have believed it was in womankind to act like it, but for all that hounds is hounds, and won't stand messing about."

There was no gainsaying so patent a fact, so Jack Morgan took a new departure.

"What are you going to do for a second whip?" he asked.

Summers removed his hat and stroked his silvery hair.

"I don't know what Miss Badsworth may have done," he said.

"How should I do, Summers? You see it's like this," Jack went on, seeing a doubtful look in the old man's face, "there will be a deal of talk in the neighbourhood, and some trying to pump out the truth. Ned can hold his tongue, so can I. Do you think I could manage the job?"

The sun was hot, and Jack Morgan and his companion walked back into the shadow of one of the buildings.

"I think if any one could larn it off-hand you could, Mr. Morgan; that is if you could stick to business."

"How do you mean?"

Summers looked the younger man up and down with something approaching a twinkle in his shrewd grey eyes, and paused before he said:—

"If you was to whip-in, you'd have to whip-in; you'd be left to bring on tail hounds if so be there were any, and that will depend on the young lady, whether she goes without 'em or whether she stops to get 'em away; they soon learns not to hurry if you wait for 'em."

Again he looked Jack up and down. "Better have a servant who's used to it, Mr. Morgan. Ned's a smart lad, and as first whip he could handle 'em if needs be. If you went

on at all you'd better take first place, but it's best not to have two amertoors, if you ask me, sir."

"No doubt you are right, Summers; I've got a good deal to do just now, and I shall have to be sort of umpire in this business, worse luck."

"I've no doubt of it, sir; and you must remember, asking your pardon, the young lady's a young lady."

Probably Dr. Johnson at his best never said truer words.

"There's no doubt of that, Summers, but I don't know what that has to do with it."

"There's such a thing as human nature, Mr. Morgan"—with a pronounced twinkle—"'twill be better to have a regular servant."

Jack Morgan gathered the old man's meaning, and it is possible his conscience confirmed the ground upon which it was based; nevertheless he said:—

"I daresay you are right, but you are always a trifle suspicious, Summers."

"Maybe I am, sir, but it's like this: scores of times when I've been coming home from hunting wondering where I'd made a mistake which lost me my fox, it's come to me, perhaps, when I'd a'most reached the kennel door. Well, it ain't no good *then* as far as that day's work goes, but it ain't amiss to bear it in mind. Maybe it makes a man what you call suspicious, but after all he's only looking out afore-hand, because he's learnt it's of no manner of use later. Now, there's young Bill Sheppard, he's a smart lad, and if any one could bring him up to the business, his father, old Bill, could. I make bold to say, Mr. Morgan, he'd do better than you."

Jack laughed; it was no use taking offence at Summers' outspoken opinion.

"As far as I know," he said, "the young lady will turn out as you or I should—a red coat and all that, you know."

"And breeches and boots, and ride man-fashion?" Summers asked.

Jack nodded.

"Well, her face, and I'll allow it's a bonnie one, will give her away," Summers said with decision.

"Perhaps she'll alter it."

"Well, she's going in for it and no mistake; but I've heard tell Miss Badsworth hankers after them things, not but what I've always seen her dressed as a lady." Then after a solemn pause: "There'll be no gettin' over her voice when she cheers hounds".

"Voices vary a good bit, Summers. Some you can hear for miles, and they ain't the loudest. Her 'Whoo! whoop!' is none so dusty; it would make your heart jump."

"Well, I dessay," with a sly look at Jack. "Perhaps 'twill pass with them that don't *know*, and there, if it don't we can't help it."

"I'll bet a shilling you forget to call her 'sir,' Summers, if she comes out as a man."

"Well, I *may* have miscalled a hound in my time, and we are all liable to mistakes, but I never *rated* and I never *cheered* one by a wrong name, Mr. Morgan. I recollect my father ratin' my brother George for something he'd done by the name of Joe, and I a-bed with the measles at the time. I heard it and somehow took it to heart, perhaps through the measles; leastways I've always been careful. Some hounds is sensitive."

In order to get the old man off the line, for more than once his face had shown signs of a knowing smile, Jack said:—

"I always think a foxhound is the greatest fool in the canine creation; he wouldn't care much what name he was called by."

"There you are wrong, Mr. Morgan, and I don't mind telling you so. It ain't the hounds, it's their bringing up; they're like sojers, dependent on their officers. It ain't one man in a thousand that would be any good if you took him sudden and promiscuous out of a regiment; he's used to do as he's told and depend on other folk. It's so with hounds, it ain't *natural* to them to be stupid, it's the way they're

worked. Look at old Niobe yonder, she's used to being about the place with my missus or me since her day's gone by, she's as 'cute as Miss Badsworth's little terrier, and a smarter dog I never saw—varmint to the tip of his tail; it ain't the hounds theirselves, it's how they're used."

"I daresay you are right, Summers. I must be off," Jack said, unhitching his cob. "I'll tell Miss Badsworth about Bill Sheppard."

"I think he would suit, sir."

"Better than I should, anyway?"

"Yes, sir, asking your pardon, better than you."

Jack waved his hand as he rode away, and Summers watched him disappear, then he said to himself:—

"He'd want to be looking after the young lady instead of the hounds; hounds ain't the only stoopid things; but there, he's young, and I don't blame him, blest if I do."

. . . . . .

When Jack Morgan seated himself in his well-worn arm-chair after luncheon, he had come to the extraordinary conclusion that, for the first time, he found the house dull; it had never appeared dull before, and he had resided alone at Newnton for some nine years. He said something hard about the late Hugo Badsworth, though what he had to do with the home comforts of Newnton did not appear, unless, of course, certain ramifications of circumstances were considered.

There are people (conscientious people, they call themselves) who, for want of something better to do, analyse their thoughts and try to trace them back to an original source, and having arrived there, go off at a tangent and worry themselves with the consideration of what they might have thought instead. Jack Morgan did nothing of the kind, there was no necessity. Just opposite him as he sat was a glass-fronted case with sliding doors, on the lower shelves of which was an array of top-boots, "roughed up" (as he would have said) for the summer. Those boots were the connecting link which suggested the remarks about the

late master of the Cranston hounds. There was no pair in particular which attracted special attention, though a goodly rip on one, caused by the latch of a swinging gate, was sufficient to raise pæans of gratitude that matters had been no worse. No, the boots taken generally roused his indignation, for they *would* associate themselves with Lavvy.

One naturally has prejudices, and Jack was no exception. Most of us are fond of our prejudices, and some go so far as to call them by pretty names, strength of character, for instance, and such like. Liberals declare that Conservatism and prejudice are synonymous; Conservatives could retort if they took the trouble, but as a rule they do not. It is an attribute of human nature to be suspicious of things to which it is not used. Jack Morgan sought in vain for precedents. Joan of Arc is said to have worn manly accoutrements. Good Queen Bess had bestridden a horse, but, unfortunately, these good people had lived so long ago that such instances were not fresh in people's memories. King Darius did not labour more assiduously to deliver the prophet from the lions than Jack Morgan did to devise a plan which should free Miss Lavinia Badsworth the younger (he didn't care so much about her aunt) from certain matters with which she had good-naturedly bound herself; but like the laws of the Medes and Persians the codicil to Hugo Badsworth's Will altered not. Why King Darius if he made one silly decree should not have made another displaying more wisdom and less vanity, instead of sitting up all night in the sulks, is a mystery. Why, if he had power *afterwards* to cast the whole lot of Daniel's accusers with their heirs and assigns into the lions' den, didn't he do so beforehand when he saw their little game? But that, of course, is another consideration.

Jack Morgan, as has been said, made aspersive remarks regarding the late Hugo Badsworth; he was powerless, and it is the part of the weak and powerless to be abusive.

It ended by his folding the promised red coat in a neat

parcel, addressing it to Miss Lavinia Badsworth, and despatching it by the hand of a trusty messenger.

Then he remembered that Miss Badsworth and her niece were going to London on the following day, and that he himself had urgent private affairs which would necessitate his presence in the metropolis.

CHAPTER XIX.

When Miss Badsworth and her niece paid a short visit to London the matters which exercised their minds were diverse. The elder lady felt positive that it was necessary for her to be rid of many responsibilities which had grown up around her; the younger was exercised as to the manner in which she should procure the outfit for the part which she intended to play.

A reference to her late uncle's personal accounts showed that Messrs. Lappel & Stock, the Bond Street tailors, were the persons who for years had supplied him with his hunting kit.

The bills of this firm contained many mysterious items, aprons amongst others, and each article of clothing, whether coats or leathers or what not, was minutely described as possessing linings, pockets, buttons and other accessories, apparently enumerated in order to make the garment in question tally with the price charged.

The full-length portrait of Hugo Badsworth was a useful object lesson, but it could answer no questions, and Lavvy, as she studied it, always found herself going back to the query, "What could have induced such a man to give such needless trouble and saddle others with impossible tasks?"

Jack Morgan could have given her all the information she needed, but of course she could not ask *him*. Her aunt, she felt sure, would be as ignorant, or more so, than she was herself. In this latter case she was wrong.

The only thing to be done was to take Messrs. Lappel & Stock by the horns, as it were, give her orders with as much confidence as she could command, and if she found

herself covered with confusion, take care there was no one else there to see it.

"I suppose, auntie, I may order such things as are necessary," she said at breakfast the morning after their arrival in London.

Miss Badsworth who was occupied in the fruitless endeavour to arrange her plans so as to be in more places than one at the same time, replied :—

"To be sure, my dear; but if you would come with me this afternoon I think you would be interested. I fear I must leave you to your own devices this morning. If you meet me at Verrey's in Regent Street at one, we can have some lunch and go on from there."

A partially dismantled house is not alluring, so Lavvy determined to get over the tailoring ordeal as quickly as possible. Being ignorant of London she signalled a hansom and gave Messrs. Lappel & Stock's address to the cabman.

Fortunately for her, Miss Lavinia Badsworth had plenty of courage, the more nervous she felt the less she showed it. If her heart was bumping about, as though it were dancing a breakdown on its own account, and her lips felt unaccountably dry, there was no outward sign of trepidation in the quiet and dignified young lady who, clad in an undeniable black costume, with a large hat to match, walked composedly into Messrs. Lappel & Stock's shop.

Mr. Lappel, who stepped forward to meet her with a courteous, reverential bow, was rather a shock.

Lavvy could not help contrasting him with the little tailor in Tordon, who was always in his shirt-sleeves, and wore a tape measure over his shoulder as though it were the chain of office of a mayor.

Mr. Lappel's dress was faultless; his frock-coat sat wrinkleless upon him; his black satin scarf, relieved by a single pearl pin, was folded with mathematical precision. Notwithstanding his long neck and consequently high collar, there was a paternal air about him which gave the impression that at any moment he might pronounce a benediction

should circumstances require it. Never was a man better qualified to be the chairman of a company, the head of a firm of family solicitors, or a diocesan registrar.

"What can I do for you, madam?" he asked in a soft, even voice, skilfully manipulating a chair with one hand and waving Lavvy towards it with the other.

The surroundings were sombre; rolls of cloth of sober hues were piled up to the ceiling. A card which described the adjacent goods as "trouserings in the latest style" gave no feeling of confidence to the girl, it rather increased her anxiety on the important point which was exercising her: how was she going to be measured and fitted?

The consequence was she replied to Mr. Lappel's query in a low voice:—

"I want some—riding things."

"Certainly, madam," Mr. Lappel said genially. "We are especially noted for the satisfaction we give to our lady customers, and in the matter of some skirts and pantaloons we have the sole patent rights. Step this way, madam, I shall have pleasure in showing you Lord Geoffry de Tinepote's latest safety skirt, which detaches itself automatically in case the rider is unfortunate enough to get a fall, and gives greater facility for catching a loose horse if no assistance is at hand."

Miss Lavinia's confidence rose as she followed Mr. Lappel, and a sense of the humorous character of the occasion struck her. Her own riding costume had been for the most part home-made, and consequently the patent apron which was first held for her inspection and then affixed to Mr. Lappel himself, caused her to smile.

"Does Lord Geoffry de Tinepote wear one himself?" she asked.

Mr. Lappel smiled as though he were undecided as to whether his customer's question was a serious one or not.

"Because," Lavvy went on, "in the late Mr. Hugo Badsworth's account I noticed items of aprons."

"To be sure; no, madam, no, those would be the white

linen aprons worn to keep the buckskin breeches unsoiled before hunting. These are patterns of the pantaloons worn with the patent skirt. Lady Sophy Macmire, a very particular lady to fit, is responsible for these; they are, in fact, an adaptation of the gentlemen's hunting breeches which we make a speciality. You mentioned the late Mr. Badsworth of Cranston, a great sportsman and a customer of ours for many years." Here Mr. Lappel gave vent to a well-constructed and sympathetic obituary notice, during which Lavvy occasionally bent her head in acknowledgment of tributes to her uncle, whilst she contemplated the pantaloons with a feeling of satisfaction that whatever other people did, she could do. With true female inconsequence she took a dislike to Lady Sophy Macmire, principally because Mr. Lappel spoke of her as a shining light; at all events she felt satisfaction in the thought that she was going one better.

"I presume," she said, "you have some record of the late Mr. Hugo Badsworth's hunting things."

"Of every detail, madam; also of the hunt servants'. Mr. Badsworth was one of the few gentlemen who put his servants into leathers. Our Mr. Blunt went to Cranston every season to take the measurements. Mr. Badsworth was particular, very particular, madam."

"Well"—Lavvy's voice was a little unsteady—"I wish to be turned out exactly like him."

The only sign which Mr. Lappel gave was the taking one step backwards; he recovered himself in a moment, and his previous position at the same time. He prided himself in displaying no sense of surprise, but there is a limit to most things, and never in the experience of thirty years had such an order been given by a lady customer. Had Lavvy informed him that she required the uniform of the First Life Guards, helmet, cuirass, jack-boots and all, he would not have been hit harder. So he cleared his throat before he said:—

"Exactly, madam, just so."

It was as a tribute to her own feelings that Lavvy offered an explanation.

"I have to hunt the Cranston hounds for a limited time next season; it is a very awkward position for me to be in, but I am going to try and see the matter through."

Mr. Lappel gave one glance at the slim, well-set-up figure of the girl; her quiet manner was in strong contrast to that of many of his lady customers, but there was a determination about the chin which inspired him with respect. His manner was genial and reassuring as he replied:—

"Every detail shall be carried out, madam. We have the hunt buttons. Will you wear corsets or not?"

There was something so matter-of-fact in the way the question was put that there was no hesitation in Lavvy's reply in the negative.

"If you will permit me to take the necessary measurements, I will call Miss Nicholson," Mr. Lappel said.

In a few minutes, clad in Lady Sophy's patents, and resembling something between a Spanish matadore and a French fencer, the dreaded ordeal was over.

When an hour later Lavvy emerged from the emporium of Messrs. Tonsure & Co., the great perruquiers, wondering what she should do with herself till it was time to join her aunt, the first person she met was Jack Morgan.

Notwithstanding the fact that she felt that every one must be staring at her, she welcomed his advent as a godsend and greeted him cordially, if with heightened colour.

Jack noticed a difference in her appearance, also that she was ill at ease; he could not quite account for the one, but having just looked in at Messrs. Lappel & Stock's, and having received a modicum of the former's bottled-up astonishment, he made a guess at the reason for the other.

"Verrey's?" he said cheerfully. "Oh! I'll pilot you in time, but there is an hour to spare. Let us go and look at pictures in one of these galleries."

So they went, and under Jack's judicious treatment the girl soon recovered her equanimity.

Jack left his companion at Verrey's at the appointed time, declining to come in, being afraid that he might be commandeered to attend a meeting.

"I'll call later," he said, "to hear how you got on; we could have put in a better time somewhere else." Then, as he raised his hat and walked away, he said to himself, "By Jove, it's her hair, of course".

Miss Badsworth looked fagged and worried as she ate her luncheon and consulted notes at the same time; she found little opportunity of paying any attention to her niece who was quite content to sit in silence.

At two o'clock was the meeting of the Amalgamated Association of the Daughters of Freedom.

. . . . . .

Lavvy was amused but not impressed as she sat at the back of the room. The apostle-esses of woman's freedom showed the same infection of nature that belonged to their less enlightened sisters. Rank outweighed efficiency when Lady Hodbearer, who was slightly deaf, was elected to the chair; and the gloomy prophecy of one of Lavvy's neighbours, "Now we shall be here all day," appeared likely to be fulfilled. Lady Hodbearer (whose husband, the great contractor, had been made a baronet) was a staunch vegetarian, and (though it had nothing to do with the matter in hand) took the opportunity, in the few words which she intended to say, to air her favourite hobby; and there being no one to call her to order, maundered on, with many vain repetitions, until she collapsed like a burnt-out night-light, leaving Lavvy to wonder what would become of "all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field," together with many livelihoods and much trade, if the good lady's ideas were universally carried into effect. To this day she is not quite sure what the object of the meeting was.

Miss Badsworth, who spoke clearly in that pleasant voice of hers, confined herself to expressing regret that she was temporarily compelled by circumstances to sever herself from much useful work; this upset most calculations. For-

tunately she possessed the Badsworth obstinacy, for Mrs. Dickinson, with an eye to vacant shoes, took the opportunity of rebuking her, and making reference to putting a hand to the plough and looking back; whereupon an admirer of Miss Badsworth's, who had a personal objection to Mrs. Dickinson, expressed herself astonished that that lady should quote Scripture which she professed to disbelieve, and went on to point out that in ploughing the sand the sooner one looked back and discontinued the operation the better. Then chaos reigned for a time. Lady Hodbearer, having had her innings, smiled benignly, and lost what nerve she had. Fortunately Miss Fortyfad, who had been invited to a reception by Lady Horatia St. Vincent (named, you know, after the great naval hero), though she professed to despise the aristocracy, moved the adjournment of the meeting.

"I am sorry, Lavvy, that you should have had such an unfortunate experience," Miss Badsworth said to her niece as they bowled homewards in a hansom.

"It was unfortunate, certainly, auntie, for instead of converting me, it was—well, just what I expected."

"But you shouldn't be prejudiced, my dear. I believe in some ways we have done a good deal of useful work."

"I am quite sure that people like you, auntie, do much that is useful, but I don't believe that turning things upside down is necessarily beneficial. I have tried it with oxlips and polyanthus; the cottagers used to say they would come double, or of different colours, but my experience is that they wouldn't come at all. It's a great pity that the bulk of those people who quarrelled with one another just now haven't got something to do to occupy their time. I felt myself unwittingly quoting Dr. Watts about Satan and mischief and idle hands. How they do hate one another, auntie!"

"My dear Lavvy, you are making a great mistake; the majority have their work at heart. It was unfortunate that Lady Hodbearer was in the chair. She has only that one idea of vegetarianism; apart from inherent prejudices, her scheme possesses insurmountable difficulties."

Lavvy leant back and smiled. "I'm afraid that is the case with a good many of the schemes," she said. "They all appear to me to come off the same piece, manufactured specially to provide occupation for restless people who desire to get the credit for originality under the guise of philanthropy. The vicar of Tordon does just the same."

Miss Badsworth was silent for nearly a minute. The last conversation with her brother Hugo passed through her mind.

"You are very like your uncle, Lavvy," she said at length. "Well, what does the vicar do?"

"I hope I am like dad, too," was the reply. "The vicar? He doesn't seem to understand that all the members of his flock have their different callings and that the ordinary routine of life isn't necessarily drudgery. He has guilds, associations, mothers' meetings, and his intention is good, but he doesn't know the people and their requirements as his predecessor did, and the result is discontent on one hand and schism on the other. People who belong to the various societies despise the rest, and those who don't belong think the others 'new-fangled' in their ideas."

"Perhaps there is something in what you say, Lavvy." Miss Badsworth relapsed into silence. She felt that she certainly had not so much time to devote exclusively to other people's affairs since the reins of government were placed in her hands at Cranston.

Jack Morgan was on the doorstep in Portman Square (quite by accident, of course) when the hansom drew up, and being bidden to partake of a cup of tea, remained.

Miss Badsworth was the first to reappear in the drawing-room. Naturally Jack had hoped that the reverse might be the case.

"I have just come from a meeting which I persuaded Lavvy to attend in the hope of interesting her, and owing to Lady Hodbearer being in the chair the whole thing was a fiasco."

"I don't think she will mind," Jack replied, after successfully resisting the temptation to say "A good job, too".

"No, I daresay not; but it certainly gave weight to what she said as we came home." Miss Badsworth gave a short *résumé*.

"I should fancy she has the courage of her opinions. She seemed to be a very busy person at home, and as far as I gathered was personally acquainted with all the cottagers for miles round. I wouldn't overburden myself, if I were you, Miss Badsworth; not for a year, at least. It will give you an opportunity of finding out the usefulness of these other ladies."

"You must remember, Mr. Morgan, that I have been associated for some years——Lavvy!"

Miss Lavvy entered the room with heightened colour, notwithstanding traces of a determined effort upon an upraised chin.

"Yes, aunt. Don't you like it? It is the result of the supreme efforts of Tonsure & Co. I've worn it all the afternoon, but, of course, it was under my hat."

Jack Morgan's presence was no doubt responsible for an air of bravado.

"I liked your own hair much the best; really, you dissappoint me. I didn't think your first visit to London would have made you a convert to what I consider a contemptible fashion."

Jack Morgan was looking at her with mingled astonishment and admiration, but a humorous twinkle lurked in his eyes. Lavvy interpreted it to mean ridicule. She flushed rosy-red, and something very like tears dimmed her vision. When you have made a sacrifice which has caused you more than one bitter pang, it certainly does not sooth you to have your motives misjudged; and when the young man for whom you are beginning to feel some slight regard appears in the ranks of your detractors, well—it's worse when you have spent the afternoon listening to a great deal of nonsense imparted by people bearing lofty looks of superiority. If you possess a temper of sorts (and you are not much good if you do not) that temper is apt to be set on edge. Lavvy's was. As a rule she didn't give way, but she wouldn't have

been a Badsworth if she hadn't taken up the cudgels on her own behalf on occasion. Beneath the becoming coiffure in which she appeared there lay the evidences of self-sacrifice. It had not been without a bitter pang that she had uttered the death warrant of her own curly locks. Recalcitrant they had ever been; no driving mist upon the moors, no salt-laden gale upon the coast, had ever succeeded in reducing them to the abject condition of "out of curl"; no water-spaniel's coat could have been more defiant of the elements. And now they were gone, to a certain extent at least, and what remained was in a charming state of insurrection, steadfastly refusing to conform to the tyranny of being parted upon one side. Lavvy turned to the mirror over the flower-decked fireplace, and put her hand to a hairpin upon which, had it been known, much depended.

It has been said that to touch the hand or features of one who has passed the gloomy portal destroys for ever the barrier of horror which stands so naturally between the living and the dead. It may be so; certainly, to fall overboard out of a punt in endeavouring to withdraw a pole from a patch of mud takes the shine out of the most "superior" Palinurus.

The reason? I cannot say; perhaps it has to do with the survival of the fittest. If not, let those decide whose business it is to probe mysteries and invent what they are unable to discover.

The touch of that hairpin had a peculiar effect; it was not withdrawn but pushed more securely into its place before Lavvy seated herself and confronted her audience of two. Though the traces of defiance were still upon her face the tone of her voice was changed.

"I wish you hadn't taken me this afternoon, auntie," she said.

"My dear child, why?" Miss Badsworth asked, all the while feeling that her pedestal was a trifle out of repair.

"Because everything that I heard was theoretical and not practical, except the quarrelling, that was practical enough. Do you take sugar, Mr. Morgan?"

Lavvy had wisely given herself something to do at the tea-table.

"I told you, Lavvy, it was an unfortunate experience for you."

"I suppose it must have been, for I confess I couldn't have believed that my sex would show up so badly; I wondered what any one of them would have done with ten children and fifteen shillings a week."

"It's always a marvel to me how those people manage," Jack put in, with an endeavour to pour oil on waters which he saw were troubled.

"Method," Lavvy replied shortly. "Method when things are done well, and they are done well, marvellously well, on occasion. Union is strength; every member of the family gradually comes into use as long as they are at home; it is when they go out that they cease to consider the old folk that gave them a start."

"I always thought the other union was all they had to look to," Jack said; he liked to hear Lavvy talk.

"It's the outdoor relief which does the mischief. Sons and daughters come to look upon it as maintenance which removes responsibility from themselves. The more you go round and tell them they are a down-trodden race, the more they believe it and the more selfish they become. I've learnt a great deal about want of method to-day. It is no good living in the seventh heaven of theory when one has things given one to do. *I* believe the only chance of success is to set to work to do them."

Lavvy relapsed into an offended silence; how much was real, and how much put on, like her hair, did not appear.

Miss Badsworth felt uncomfortable, and Jack Morgan was puzzled as he watched each variation of the girl's expression.

"You appear to blame me for something, Lavvy," the former said doubtfully.

Lavvy was forced to smile, she couldn't help it when she noticed the bewildered look on her aunt's face.

"I do and I don't, auntie," she said. "You remind me of

the teetotal stories of the inebriate who, having taken the pledge, experiences difficulties in keeping it when thrown amongst boon companions. You have a sneaking regard for a set of cats who are not worthy to wipe your patent leather shoes, which ought to be thick and ill-fitting, only they are not; there, I've said it, and you must be angry with me if you want to be. I really cannot help it; I would sooner you visited your wrath upon me than on the memory of poor Uncle Hugo. I've had my hair cut short and I don't like it."

"But why did you do it, Lavvy? If there is one fashion——"

"Fashion, auntie! Please don't stare at me, Mr. Morgan" (Jack never moved his eyes). "Fashion!" She felt quite angry that her aunt did not grasp the situation. "Fancy any woman who had got hair of her own cutting it off voluntarily in order to wear some one else's!"

"They do, my dear."

"Well, then, they are not women in the true sense of the word."

"I hardly think you should condemn them so generally," Miss Badsworth said.

"I do!" Jack exclaimed heartily.

For a moment Lavvy glared at him, but he was not the least disconcerted.

"I can guess your reason," he added.

Lavvy's wrath evaporated once more; there is something sustaining in feeling that one has an ally, but she needn't have flushed up to that rosy pitch as she said to her aunt:—

"I've got to be your niece and secretary, haven't I, auntie? Well, here I am; now, wait a moment."

She disappeared through the folding doors of the back drawing-room, and presently her head only reappeared—the head of a good-looking boy, surmounted by a velvet hunting-cap.

Again Mr. Morgan might feel shocked if he liked; but

Jack did not, he appreciated to the full the manner in which Lavvy was throwing herself into the work which had fallen to her lot.

Of course he ought to have resented what might have been supposed to be an unwomanlike demonstration, but do what he would he couldn't consider it unwomanlike; there was something in Lavvy which was Lavvy, that is how he put it; in other words, by her simplicity she disarmed the criticism which she raised. So he quietly walked across the room and stretched out his hand.

The impulsive action affected Lavvy much as the reaching down of a strong hand would affect an exhausted swimmer: she held out her own and with a smile accepted the silent tribute of appreciation.

"Come and explain the riddle to Miss Badsworth," he said.

And Lavvy went. "I've got to be your huntsman, too, auntie. It really has to be done, and you cannot hate it more than I do."

It was the short curly hair that resented the parting so energetically that affected Miss Badsworth. She was a thorough woman herself at heart, and consequently could understand many things which did not appear on the surface. As a leader, with respect to her own views, it was a novelty to be led. For some little time she listened to Lavvy's apologia; then, ye gods of Olympus! she found herself stooping to consider such mundane things as the future of Jack Morgan and her niece. But withal she was impressed, impressed that is by what Lavvy had called method; and so, by-and-by, she cast regrets and reminiscences to the winds.

"My dear child," she said, "your foresight and energy do you infinite credit; don't be afraid, I will play my part."

They embraced, and Jack wondered where he came in. The part of umpire has its drawbacks when one is desirous of playing in the game.

CHAPTER XX.

MISS BADSWORTH was as good as her word; when once she had burnt her boats she went into the matter in hand with all her natural energy. The manner of burning her boats emanated from Lavvy.

"You cannot be bothered to death with letter-writing, auntie," she had said. "Your good friends won't leave you alone, you may be sure of that, and I don't blame them; you will be constantly requested to do this, that or the other, for they cannot possibly help missing you. We shall have as much business correspondence as we can manage. Dad says you will be inundated with letters: complaints of damage, complaints of gates being left open and cattle straying in consequence, and no end of demands for compensation from people who have lost a fabulous amount of fowls, the which, if they ever existed, would preclude the necessity for importing poultry from foreign lands; all these things will require attention. Later on there will be fixtures to make and cards to be sent out (it appears that Uncle Hugo did all these things himself), and the ordinary business letters, like the poor, will be always with us. Now why not get some nice paper from the stores with the address, Cranston Lodge, at the top and a lovely NO, printed, say, in red and gold towards the bottom of the page in the form of a monogram. You would then only have to write 'Miss Badsworth regrets that circumstances compel her to say'—and nobody could possibly be offended at the beautiful monogram NO."

"Really, Lavvy, you have original ideas," Miss Badsworth replied, laughing. "It certainly sounds like a good scheme."

"We are in an original position, auntie. It's an age of labour-saving appliances; we must save ourselves all we can, and that is one way. Then dad says you must not be at home and at every one's beck and call, including people with claims, except at a fixed time—say, half-past nine till half-past ten; you must make no promises, but keep a bottle of sherry in the business-room cupboard, that, he says, will speed the parting guest; and you must ride over and investigate things for yourself; he advises you to buy an active cob, which Tom Barlow recommends, for thirty pounds, and go everywhere, there is nothing like it to keep people up to the mark of truth. There is dad's letter, auntie."

Lavvy handed the lengthy missive to her aunt, and Miss Badsworth read it carefully.

"Your father does not appear to take a very high estimate of agriculturist probity," she said, as she handed the letter back.

"They are brought up and live and thrive or fail on bargains, auntie; it's only a matter of degree between them and other folk, I expect, Mrs. Dickinson & Co., for instance. You were a great deal too good for that lot, auntie, and dad only wants to save your good nature from being imposed upon. We are certain to be let in, as he calls it, somewhere, but we may as well keep our eyes open."

Miss Lavvy wisely closed her aunt's lips with a kiss, and that lady found it impossible to be cross with her. In fact before many days had passed she found that method was so valuable an ally in resolving order out of chaos that she began to take to it as keenly as the schemes which she had previously adopted.

Of course people called, and some went so far as to condole with Miss Badsworth upon the awkward position in which she must find herself. This they did, doubtless, with the intention of finding out for themselves the foundation of certain rumours which pervaded the neighbourhood.

Lavvy, who was introduced as "my niece, Lavinia," was

impressed by the clever way in which her aunt evaded questions and kept her own counsel.

It was not until the visit of Lady Flora Parkfield that the plan of campaign was modified. The old lady drove herself over in her phaeton and was ushered into Miss Badsworth's presence in a whirlwind fashion of her own.

"These motors, my dear," she exclaimed, holding out both hands, "will be death, destruction and ruin to us and everything else. You know that narrow place, just beyond your lower lodge gate, with the sharp corner (I told your poor brother dozens of times he ought to alter the road, and he used to say he kept it as it is because his friends were so proud of driving or being driven round it by their coachmen after dinner without mishap, it was, in fact, a sort of county test of sobriety), well, just there I met Toby Sorter (Sir Gregory's only son, you know; no more right to possess a motor, though perhaps it's hired, than I have to wear the Queen's crown, for his father hasn't sixpence to spend, or says he hasn't) and Mrs. Sandhurst (people have a lot to say about her, but I don't believe there is a bit of harm in the woman), just like two babies, trying to see how fast the thing would go before it killed them. My cobs are sensible creatures enough, but it's too much to expect of well-bred animals not to notice a rattling, smelly machine coming at twenty miles an hour, with two people who looked as if they were a cross between Nansen and a polar bear with a touch of Guy Fawkes thrown in. There's a ditch on the near side (I made Hugo promise to have it filled in, but, poor man, he died before it was done), and—well, I'm here as you see, but it was only by God's mercy and the skin of my teeth. I didn't call before because I know what's what in the country, and you wouldn't want an old woman fussing about when you were busy; but I've just looked in to say I sympathise with you thoroughly, and if I can be of any use, command me. I've lived for years amongst honest folk, thieves, robbers and shams—plenty of shams. I get 'sucked in,' as Jack Morgan says, now and again, but not often, and then

(you'll hear plenty of people tell you different) I never talk —not conversation, my dear, I don't mean that, I like a chat, but—you know."

Miss Badsworth smiled at the old lady's good-natured garrulity, and had a shrewd notion that here was a trustworthy ally; Lavvy's heart went out to her, but then, perhaps, she was prejudiced in Lady Flora's favour owing to words which had fallen from Jack Morgan's lips.

"My niece, Lavinia," Miss Badsworth said, by way of introduction.

"Ha! my dear, I trust you are a Badsworth; a touch of obstinacy—that's characteristic of Badsworths—isn't a bad thing in moderation, though it may be carried too far—people call it by all sorts of names, strength of character and such like. Now you must come across and shake me by the hand. I can't get out of my chair as readily as I could, but when I'm up I can go a long time."

"I think I am a Badsworth all right, Lady Flora," Lavvy said, taking the old lady's proffered hand.

Lady Flora retained the girl's hand whilst her quick piercing eyes looked her over.

After they had rested on Lavvy's hair she said "Um," and the colour rose in the girl's face.

"What have you done with your curly hair, my dear?" Lady Flora asked. "Oh! never mind! I'm not inquisitive" (as she saw that Lavvy was uncomfortable). "I'll tell you how I came to hear about it. You are Charles Badsworth's daughter, aren't you? I thought so. I daresay he doesn't remember playing 'I spy' with Flora Cust; he was a little boy and I a big girl. Oh! yes, I was a girl once, though you mightn't think it. Well, I was over at Tod's Farm a few days ago. James Edwards (Jimmy we always call him) had a nice Jersey cow (I'm rather proud of my Jersey herd), and we got talking after we had done business (I made him give me a sovereign back, but then, of course, I knew from the price he expected to have to do it), and I happened to ask him if his nephew, Ned Barlow, was going to stay on here as whip,

and then we went on from one thing to another, heartily condoling with you, my dear" (to Miss Badsworth), "and wondering what had possessed poor Hugo, for he wasn't a fool by any means, though he didn't alter that road. Jimmy said he never saw but one woman hunt hounds, and she did it right well, and that was in Cornwall. He has a brother or sister at—let me see——"

"Tordon," Lavvy put in.

"To be sure, Tordon, that's the place. Jimmy said Charles Badsworth kept a pack of harriers, had an only daughter—that must be you, my dear; he described you—never mind what he said—it was a pity, in his opinion, it wasn't Miss Lavvy instead of her aunt; that was the pith of it. I really do feel for you, my dear" (this to Miss Badsworth), "business woman though no doubt you are, it's putting an impossibility into your hands. I often think if it had fallen to my lot five-and-twenty years ago, when I was more your age, I should have given in; upon my word I think I should, though I hate giving in."

"I have given in," Miss Badsworth said with a quiet smile. "I couldn't very well have done anything else. I am going to do as much as I possibly can, but Lavvy will hunt the hounds."

"Ah! Bless my soul, is that so? Hum! But how about the Will? Stop! Don't tell me a word unless you wish to do so. I'm not inquisitive, and I may as well tell you I hate gossip."

"There is nothing to conceal that I know of; it will all come out by-and-by," Miss Badsworth said; "but I don't suppose it is generally known—I will leave the matter in your hands, Lady Flora, to do just as you think fit—that the special clause in my poor brother's Will stipulates that 'for one calendar month from the 1st of November Lavinia Badsworth shall hunt the hounds'. We go upon the point (for what it is worth) that 'my sister' or 'the before-mentioned' is omitted."

Lady Flora drew in her breath with a sort of whistle as

she looked from aunt to niece and then from niece to aunt. Though it was a summer day she rubbed her hands slowly together, then she chuckled softly and murmured "Capital!"

"What the law will decide is another matter," Miss Badsworth said, and there was something in the calm dignity of her manner and softness of her voice which took Lady Flora's fancy.

"With the exception of the Nonconformist conscience I know nothing so elastic or one-sided as the law," she said. "In trying to be a 'Jack on both sides' it usually tumbles down between the two, and ends by warmly embracing the side upon which you happen *not* to be. I sincerely hope it will not come to law."

"I hardly think my nephew will let matters rest," Miss Badsworth said.

"Um, perhaps not. I must say, my dear, I don't for one moment believe that was Hugo Badsworth's real disposal of his property."

"Neither do I, Lady Flora," Lavvy exclaimed eagerly, looking up at her uncle's picture. "He must have been much too like dad. Dad would have been quite capable of playing off a joke on auntie, but he would have taken care to do no harm."

"Would he? That is what I should have expected of Hugo."

"We have searched everywhere," Lavvy said.

"Have you looked in his top-boots?"

"My brother was most methodical; all his papers were most carefully arranged," Miss Badsworth remarked.

"To be sure, my dear; but people do odd things with Wills, put them in safe places and forget where they are; why they should be ashamed of making a Will I don't know, but people are, and some are superstitious. Now I come to think of it, I can't remember where mine is; but Hugo's will turn up. Whatever else he did he wouldn't have played the fool with the hounds; forgive me, you know what I mean.

So that's why you cut your hair short, my dear, I see; hunting-cap, red coat and things."

"Lavvy thought she had better pose as a man," Miss Badsworth remarked.

"In order to be able to swear, or what? I wouldn't! It would only make it more difficult for you; you would never disguise yourself, your voice would give you away for one thing, and, well, lots of other things!"

"But a moustache makes such a difference," Lavvy said, laughing.

"But you can't *grow* one, my dear." Lady Flora surveyed the girl's smooth upper lip. "Suppose it pours with rain all day, or you get into Toddleton brook, it will come off to a certainty, or hang on by one side or something."

"There is something in that, certainly," Lavvy said, laughing.

"There would be in the brook, anyway. No; if I were you I'd nail my colours to the stupid codicil and Lavinia Badsworth—breeches, boots, coat, cap and all the rest of it—that's what I would do and take deuced good care I wasn't interfered with. You'd never make a man, child, but you will make an uncommonly—well, never mind; besides" (turning to Miss Badsworth) "here is a splendid chance of showing the capabilities of womenkind. Stop a bit!" (holding up her hand as Miss Badsworth was about to speak) "I'm not condemning your theories, you have as much right to them as I have to my fads, and I partly agree with you up to a certain point. There's a want of provision for old age in the dress business, as I told Jack Morgan not long ago, no 'old age pensions,' in fact; if I had come in rationals just now, you would have been chuckling all the time, instead of courteously listening to an old woman's cackle. That's the weak point of your scheme, my dear, you shouldn't leave the old women out; if they have got any brains they gather their experience in the world just like men. Now, when is your puppy show?"

"Puppy show?" queried Miss Badsworth.

"Oh, you must have a show, of course, or people will be dissatisfied; puppies that have been out at walk. It's only a matter of a tent, a good spread, a few dozens of champagne and two or three silver cups. You will have to preside, Miss Badsworth—a woman in the chair for the first time in the memory of man—and they will drink your health and you'll respond, and we'll all come and support you. Two huntsmen from fashionable packs and one gentleman would make the best staff of judges; the huntsmen would know something, and the gentleman would look as if he did."

"I see uncle used to have the show early next month," Lavvy said. "I was going to ask auntie about it as soon as Mr. Morgan had marked off the days to be avoided; we are only just settling into working order."

"That is all right so long as you are prepared for it; Jack's a reliable man, but you'll have to keep these menfolk at a distance or you'll get mobbed and show no sport."

"Auntie will be field-master, Lady Flora, and she will see to all that, and do it well, you may depend."

"I'm learning my business gradually, it seems," Miss Badsworth said reflectively.

"Whatever happens, don't be soft-hearted, my dear," Lady Flora remarked cheerily. "Look upon all the folk with whom you have to deal as cheats and swindlers, that's what the law does, and it's the only good thing about it; you'll be more often right than wrong; that's what I do" (Lady Flora's good-humoured eyes belied her words). "They'll come to you with pathetic tales of woe and apocryphal losses, but most of them won't stand sifting. You've a good man in Grimes, and Hibbert turns out his horses well, of course he gets dabs in the hand over forage, but they all do that, and Joe Summers is in a class by himself; with them and this little lady (I've heard of the prize butter, my dear, you must come and see my dairy) you will come off with flying colours. They tell me" (this to Lavvy) "you go like steam."

"Who says so?" Lavvy asked, smiling.

"Oh—er—let me see; Jimmy Edwards was one."

The younger Miss Badsworth had a shrewd suspicion that someone else had been talking, but fortunately she had to accompany Lady Flora to her carriage. Her ladyship leant down when she had gathered up her reins.

"Come up my way when you are out at exercise," she said. "I'm always about soon after six."

. . . . . .

"Lavvy, I think Lady Flora Parkfield is right," Miss Badsworth said when her niece returned.

"When one comes to think of it, I am sure she is, auntie. I've had misgivings about being able to keep up the character. After all, it's a case of being 'in for a penny in for a pound,' and poor Uncle Hugo must bear the blame."

Miss Lavvy couldn't forbear giving her aunt a dig, so she went on: "I expect people will be disappointed at your not coming out in the same style, auntie".

"My dear Lavvy, I think people, as you call them, misrepresent my views very much; I couldn't understand what Lady Flora meant by 'old age pensions'."

"I'm quite sure they do, auntie. Lady Flora would have looked odd in rational costume at her age and with her figure; I think that is what she meant, but she is a dear old thing, and I feel certain that she won't say a word beyond standing up for us."

"She certainly was very hearty and nice," Miss Badsworth said meditatively.

That very afternoon Miss Lavvy went forth to a secluded spot, made a funeral pile of dry sticks and burnt her coiffure.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was the eve of the puppy show. All arrangements had been made with a liberal hand. Jack Morgan supplied the details, and Miss Badsworth and her niece duly carried them out.

Curiosity is a strong incentive, and curiosity, therefore, influenced a variety of persons who, in the ordinary course of events, would have displayed little interest in the proceedings. To see a woman at the head of affairs was a novelty; Miss Badsworth would take the chair at the luncheon as a matter of course. Hugo Badsworth had always done so, and his successor would follow suit; but it is just possible that Lady Flora's announcement that she should make a point of being present had as much to do with the numerous acceptations as the exceptional character of the situation.

Two huntsmen from celebrated packs and a neighbouring M.F.H. consented to act as judges.

Then came the thorn in the rose, or the flesh, or whatever you like to call it.

"Now, what is to be done about that?"

Miss Badsworth asked her niece the question as she handed a letter across the breakfast table.

Miss Lavvy read it, proceeding with her breakfast at the same time (for she had been out for three hours' exercise with the hounds already, but a feeling of soreness inside the knees did not detract from her appetite). A slight curl of the lip was the only perceptible change in her countenance as she refolded the letter.

"There is only one thing to be done, auntie," she said. "Let her come; you cannot very well help it as she says

she will be here this evening. It's very cool of her not to give you a loophole for escape, but after all will it not be just as well that she should see for herself how occupied you are and how impossible it is for you to go on with the fal-lals just at present?"

Mrs. Dickinson was the author of the letter, the emblazoned NO had not had the effect on her which Lavvy anticipated, and a desperate attempt had to be made to reclaim her backsliding chieftainess.

"It's very awkward; just now, too," Miss Badsworth said ponderingly.

"You are not afraid of her, are you, auntie?"

"No, my dear, I don't think I'm *afraid* of her, but you see we have been associated so closely in carrying out many schemes that I hardly know what to do."

"You'll have to stick to your guns, auntie, and there is no one in the world more capable of doing so than you." Miss Lavvy administered this moral pat on the back with full intent. "Does she ride?" she asked.

"I should hardly think so," Miss Badsworth replied, "though she is the sort of person who theoretically can do everything. The fact is, Lavvy, she is not *quite* a lady, and, now I come to think of it, does not possess much tact."

"Then, auntie, be firm with her, and I will do my best and see you through it."

"I know you will, my dear; but remember, *she* will be my guest."

"To be sure, but by her own invitation. Oh yes, auntie, we will dispense the old-time hospitality to the chance wayfarer, and if the worst comes to the worst I will take her for a ride and amuse her for you." (Here Miss Lavvy's eyes twinkled.) "The Banker" (the Cornish Galloway) "will carry her like a bird and an arm-chair combined."

"You won't play her any tricks, Lavvy?"

"I'll be like a mother to her," the younger lady replied, and added "as long as she treats you well."

Like Saul of Tarsus, Mrs. Dickinson arrived at Cranston

station breathing threatenings and slaughter, but the very sight of the well-appointed brougham and pair of horses, to say nothing of the smart footman who relieved her of her handbag and cloak upon the platform, moderated her confidence, and she felt some diffidence in pointing out as her possession the somewhat seedy travelling box. The rigid backs of the coachman and before-mentioned footman seen through the front windows of the brougham, with their bright livery buttons catching the slanting rays of the sun, the lodge gate with its curtseying keeper, the avenue of trees and finally the house itself, altered Mrs. Dickinson's high-handed plan of campaign. As Jack Morgan would have said, these things took the stuffing out of her, and made her almost wish she had not come. She rallied at the thought that Miss Badsworth would be alone and as good-naturedly yielding as of old; but when she was ushered into the drawing-room there was someone else, a quiet, unobtrusive girl with short-cut curly hair, whom Miss Badsworth introduced as her niece, and who demurely asked if she would take sugar in her tea. The girl's eyes and the set of her chin must have marked her as an opponent, for there was no other clue to the fact, and yet Mrs. Dickinson put her down as such.

The Vicar, a quiet, common-sense man, of the muscular Christian type, and Jack Morgan, made up the party at dinner. To the latter Lavvy had confided the state of affairs.

"I'll look after her," Jack had replied. "Let me see, she's an advanced, go-as-you-please in clothes sort of party, isn't she? I mean—I beg your pardon—I don't——" seeing the colour rise in Lavvy's face.

"What you have got to do is to see that she doesn't worry auntie," Lavvy interrupted, trying to look serious.

"I'm there, all there! She shan't have the ghost of a chance, you see!" Jack exclaimed.

He was as good as his word. Mrs. Dickinson hadn't a chance of doing more than attempt the conversion of what she called "a very sensible young man".

An unusual glass of champagne did much. Jack noted it, and when once or twice the conversation took a dangerous turn he made unobserved signals to the butler and plunged bravely, though cautiously, into abstruse matters, as one approaches a ford upon one side of which tradition locates a deep hole but is careful to abstain from stating whether it is above or below the safe track. More than once he was out of his depth and had to resort to compliments upon Mrs. Dickinson's knowledge and experience, which proved acceptable. Finally he supported the lady's expressed views on the inferiority, not to say baseness, of the male sex taken together, by a heartrending tale which he called upon the Vicar to corroborate. That good man had never heard of the circumstances, and the expression on his face gave reason for belief that he was about to state it as a fact. A vigorous kick from Jack bestowed beneath the table, and taking effect below the knee-cap, changed the expression to one of pain and at the same time gave the Vicar his cue, *viz.*, that some sort of acquiescence was required of him. That kick must have reminded him of a certain blow, just above the pad, which had eventually caused him to be run out when playing for his 'Varsity at Lords. It was his partner's fault, for he ought to have known that a short run would be doubtful under the circumstances; it was ten years ago, but it still rankled.

So it came about that without in any way compromising himself by vouching for Jack's story, he calmly and good-temperedly took Mrs. Dickinson on, and, being skilled in the choice of his words, managed to prove conclusively that a woman's excellence depended on her undertaking matters for which she was properly qualified.

Mrs. Dickinson's well-worn arguments in favour of woman's superiority, which were all-sufficient amongst unthinking people, appeared to rebound from the Vicar each time that he lowered his head in courteous acknowledgment of them, and not once did he permit a shadow of sarcasm to mar the musical qualities of his pleasant voice.

Lavvy created the diversion when Mrs. Dickinson, who had talked herself into difficulties, "came up from her corner the worse for wear".

"But suppose, Mr. Horner, a woman finds herself compelled by circumstances to undertake matters for which she is naturally incompetent."

"That, my dear young lady, is hardly a case in point; I was speaking of choice; there is no choice under the conditions you mention."

There was a twinkle in the Vicar's eye.

Miss Badsworth pushed back her chair and rose. As Lavvy passed him, Jack said in a low voice: "I did my best to get her head up by holloaing her off the line".

"Thanks," Lavvy replied with a smile. It must have been the smile or the manner in which the word was spoken which made Jack, when he closed the door, remark so cheerily:—

"Now, Vicar, let us close up and possess our souls in peace. That is the very devil of a woman."

To which the Vicar replied:—

"My dear Jack, she means well; she is rather empty-headed, but don't forget she was not kicked at school as you and I were."

. . . . . .

"Would you like a ride to-morrow morning, Mrs. Dickinson? If you have not brought a habit with you I think we can fit you out."

Lavvy asked the question soon after the ladies had reached the drawing-room.

Mrs. Dickinson in the depths of an easy-chair, with her ideas not quite so clear as they were wont to be, and possessed of an unaccountable desire to go to sleep, roused herself and hesitated. She did not like to say she knew nothing about riding, and had never mounted anything but a donkey, and that long ago when a child at the seaside. She extended a hand towards "the Reformer," seated at his mistress's feet, but he looked the other way, as though he were taking no compliments from strangers.

"It is some time since I have ridden," she said in the tone of one whose mind is not made up.

"Like swimming, one doesn't forget how to do it," Lavvy replied reassuringly. "I hope you won't object to an early start; to-morrow the puppy show is held, so it will be a busy day."

"A puppy show!" Mrs. Dickinson exclaimed, sitting up in her chair. "What is that?"

"Very like a baby show; you have those in London, don't you? Only in this case the judges select the best puppies that come in from walk."

"Surely the judges would be better occupied in administering the law," Mrs. Dickinson said, suddenly struck with a hazy recollection of her mission to reclaim Miss Badsworth, who was now judiciously occupied at her writing-table, from the frivolous line of country life she had taken.

Lavvy laughed softly, and no one could be angry with her when she laughed.

"It is just as if you sent a number of children for country holidays, you do sometimes, do you not?" (Mrs. Dickinson took no part in such practical affairs) "and mustered them on their return and appointed judges to decide which had been best looked after. Come and ride with me at half-past five to-morrow morning and then you will understand more about it."

"Half-past five in the morning!" Mrs. Dickinson exclaimed. She had supposed that country people passed much of their time in bed for want of something better to do.

Lavvy nodded. "The days are very hot, we have to take advantage of the early morning."

With overnight courage, which fails to take in all the elements of danger, Mrs. Dickinson acquiesced and Lavvy bore her triumphantly away.

"If you take my advice, you won't burn the candle at both ends," she said; and so Miss Badsworth, relieved of all responsibility, was left to the entertainment of her male guests in peace.

She apologised for the absence of the other ladies.

"An alliance between theory and practice, if I mistake not," the Vicar remarked.

Jack Morgan said nothing, but he would have found it difficult to raise an objection had Mrs. Dickinson retired to a bed of thorns.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. DICKINSON dreamed a dream.

Whether the champagne or the equestrian garments with which Lavvy had supplied her, or a combination of both, furnished materials for the vision matters not—she dreamed a dream.

Arrayed in unfamiliar apparel and mounted on a foaming steed, which appeared ready at any moment to slip from under her, she confronted the Vicar, who, clad in a suit of mail but otherwise unarmed, sat and smiled at her from the depths of an arm-chair; between them Miss Badsworth, in evening dress, reclined upon a sofa and persisted, as people do in dreams, in talking of anything except the matter in hand.

Mrs. Dickinson harangued, but whenever she approached a convincing peroration her steed displayed a propensity to sit down and join in.

Clinging desperately to a mane which came out in handfuls, she became aware of a voice which said:—

"You shouldn't sleep on your back. It's five o'clock."

Mrs. Dickinson opened dazed eyes, uttered a subdued shriek, clutched the bedclothes and drew them up to her chin; the reason being that a youth in a stained red coat, Bedford cord breeches and top-boots, with a pair of spurs in his hand, stood beside her bed, urging her to jump up or else she would be late.

Mrs. Dickinson took in every detail, from the neatly folded scarf, fastened by a fox-tooth pin, to the shining boots.

"It's only me," Lavvy said, smiling at the other lady's look of terror.

"You! I thought——"

"Yes; these things make a difference, don't they? That is why women will never wear them; but be as quick as you can, you will find a cup of tea ready in the hall."

Lavvy disappeared, and Mrs. Dickinson commenced her toilet in a dazed condition of mind, trying to recall Lavvy's explanations and directions of the previous evening.

"Lunge her in deep ground if she is restive, that is to say, keep her occupied with unfamiliar things," Jack Morgan had advised, "she'll be all the more tractable if she is a bit below herself."

Lavvy saw the wisdom of the advice when Mrs. Dickinson somewhat awkwardly descended the stairs.

"You are surely not going out hunting," she exclaimed, giving vent to the anxieties which were inwardly besetting her as Lavvy thrust a horn into the breast of her coat.

"No; we don't hunt in July, though I believe my uncle used to say he had killed a fox in every month of the year. Come and have some tea, we must make a start directly."

The grey pall of mist which gave promise of a hot day assisted in damping Mrs. Dickinson's courage as the two made their way to the stables, and the sight of the Banker with another smart pony beside him affected her as the scaffold must affect the criminal who realises that hope is gone. For the next few minutes Mrs. Dickinson was so occupied with attempting to be at one with the Banker, who, resenting being hard held by the head, broke into a short, jerky trot, that she never clearly realised what occurred. She had a dim recollection afterwards of a grave-looking man in a long white coat; a sea of black, white and tan which flowed with welcoming sounds towards her companion; two men in bowler hats, red coats, breeches and top-boots, who sat quietly upon their horses a little apart from one another; a number of names reeled off by Miss Lavvy as she leaned down from her pony and seemingly addressed atoms in the vortex of waving sterns, and then one short and one long note on the horn, which made the

Banker set up his back and squib, thereby nearly bringing about a dissolution of partnership.

When Mrs. Dickinson had recovered herself, she was in the centre of a procession, one red-coated man in front, one following behind, and Miss Lavvy with a perfectly grave face saying, "Let him have his head, he will go quite smoothly".

Shortly the Banker resumed his customary business-like demeanour, and his rider regained sufficient confidence to look about her and envy the graceful ease of the rider on her off side.

"You don't mean to say the dogs have all got names!" she exclaimed, as the second whip admonished a loitering hound.

"How else could you distinguish them any more than you could human beings?" Lavvy asked in reply.

"But do they know their names? To me they all look alike," Mrs. Dickinson said.

"There is a good deal to learn in this world," Lavvy replied drily, "but even hounds learn some of it."

Mrs. Dickinson pondered; she was profoundly impressed. Presently she said:—

"It must cost a great deal of money to keep all these dogs and horses, surely it would be much better spent——"

"On the abolition of the responsibility of parents?" Lavvy interrupted. "Perhaps it would. Jog on, Ned."

Poor Mrs. Dickinson! Never had an incipient argument on a favourite hobby been more assuredly cut off in its early youth! For full twenty minutes she bumped up and down to the accompaniment of a slow jog-trot, breathless, and eventually with a stitch in her side.

Lavvy observed her out of the corner of one eye, and was rather at two with herself for the feeling of intense satisfaction which crept over her.

"I must try and impress her with the fact that she doesn't know everything, and has no right to lay down the law to everyone else," she thought.

At Casselton Common, where they had resumed a foot pace once more, Ned Barlow looked round and asked :—

"Across the common, mum ?"

Lavvy nodded, and Ned held open the gate.

"Come along, Mrs. Dickinson, there is some good sound turf here," Lavvy said sweetly, blew her horn and cantered away in front with the two whips following in rear of the pack. The Banker shook his head and went also, with Mrs. Dickinson clinging desperately to the crutch of her saddle. The pony's action was low and easy, but his rider being flurried failed signally to accommodate herself to it; the faces of the men behind her wore grins.

To tell the truth, Lavvy forgot all about her companion as she whistled to the leading hounds on either side of her and enjoyed the fresh morning air which met her as she went; she had been out often enough already to become accustomed to her costume. The new pony had excellent manners and paces. It was pleasant, too, to be off the road, which, though a necessary evil, she disliked as much as did some of the older hounds; she did not even observe a figure in a tweed suit galloping across the common at an angle to join company further on.

"Come along!" she cried; "a gallop will do you all good!" and then she shook up her pony so that "the Reformer" had to stretch himself in order to go the pace.

The man in the tweed suit gazed admiringly at the smart little figure and easy seat, and watched both pony and rider as they popped over the two dry ditches which here converged, in winter carrying off the flood-water from the upper ground beyond; but then his attention was diverted to a lady in a habit who was decidedly in difficulties.

The Banker, desirous of being in front, and resenting the unaccustomed hands which hauled at his mouth, and the uncertain position of the burden on his back, took charge and covered the first of the ditches with a bound which would have gone a long way towards clearing a Lincolnshire drain.

"She's off! No, she isn't! Well saved! Ah, there she goes!" Jack Morgan exclaimed to himself. "Hard lines having that second ditch so soon." Then he intercepted the Banker, caught his rein, shouted to Ned Barlow, who was pulling up, to go on, and led the pony back to the champion of women's rights sitting breathless on the turf.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dickinson," he exclaimed cheerily. "No harm done, I hope?" Then, seeing the lady's bewildered face, "Never mind; we all do it sometimes and think nothing of it".

"Oh, it's awful!" Mrs. Dickinson stated her opinion with conviction.

"It certainly is," Jack replied sympathetically. "There is more in it than one would think; but don't give in, let me put you up again; you'll soon be all right, it's only a little awkward at first."

No one would have supposed that the young man who put Mrs. Dickinson into the saddle and gave her some useful hints was wishing her at home in her bed or inside the safer and more familiar London 'bus, and himself at the farther end of the common.

Casselton, the residence of Lady Flora Parkfield, was the only domain in the Cranston country which possessed a herd of deer. Concerning this, Joe Summers had dispensed much counsel and advice. "You may find yourself there more often than you think for, ma'am" (he had adopted this title), "and you must have your hounds steady or you will be getting into trouble; they've a way, those deer, of bouncing up just when you don't want 'em if hounds are running across the park, and its very trying to young hounds when their blood is up." With much detail the old man had set forth the proper duties of both huntsman and whips, and Lavvy had forborne to state that in the capacity of the latter she had often had to bustle about and stop the puppies amongst the moorland sheep in Cornwall.

So it was that, having ascertained that Mrs. Dickinson had come to no harm, Lavvy entered Casselton Park and rode

"SHE'S OFF! NO, SHE ISN'T! WELL SAVED! AH, THERE SHE GOES!"

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slowly along beside the bracken with her horn in her hand, uttering an occasional word of warning as ever and anon a young hound gazed wistfully at forms retreating swiftly beneath the beech trees.

"We had better stick to the road just here," Jack said to his companion. "It's sometimes a ticklish job with young hounds amidst deer; you see they have to learn to leave them alone like sheep or cattle."

"Have they? Why?"

"Few people not in the know are aware how much education comes in to the making of a pack of hounds."

"How does Miss Badsworth know about it?"

"I suppose just as a national schoolmistress learns her trade, but I don't know. I have only seen her out once, and then she certainly surprised me. Ah! that's unlucky!"

A fallow hind jumped out of a patch of fern close beside the pack, and in a moment two, three, five couples of young hounds were in hot pursuit, and the two whips riding for all they were worth to stop them.

"Gar away baik! War riot!" accompanied by the sharp cracking of whips, resounded in the clear morning air in spite of the merry chorus of the erring hounds.

"It sounds very cheery, doesn't it?" Jack said. "Like many other things in this world, it's a pity that it's wrong. Perhaps the sound of hounds in full cry does not appeal to you, Mrs. Dickinson, and I daresay you are not aware that there are few young women in England who would, under the circumstances, have sufficient presence of mind to do what Miss Badsworth is doing."

"To me she appears to be doing nothing beyond sitting still on her horse."

"That's just it," Jack replied, without taking his eyes off the little figure in the red coat.

Lavvy waited patiently. "Wanderer," "Capstan," "Penitent," were names which travelled up to the two spectators on the higher ground, as the girl rated individual members of the pack who seemed inclined to join with their erring brethren.

Presently the cry of hounds ceased, and the void was filled with "Gar away on baik," the crack of whips and the occasional yowl as a thong descended on a culprit more resolute than the rest. Then Miss Badsworth blew her horn and rode slowly away in an opposite direction, looking over her shoulder and watching the fugitives endeavouring to avoid the horses in close pursuit.

"That will do; don't knock them about any more," she cried, when the men were within hearing; then blew her horn again, and as the hounds came up, spoke words of admonition to some by name, whose drooping sterns proved that in their cases the whipcord had told. Jack Morgan looked on with admiration in which perhaps some prejudice in the young lady's favour mingled.

"That's the way to do it," he said.

"It seems to me very cruel to beat the dogs like that," Mrs. Dickinson said.

"'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' Isn't that supposed to be a wise maxim? You see, it's like this: they have got to learn right from wrong before the season begins, but you will please to notice that the huntsman is, or should be, their refuge, the whippers-in the avengers. See?"

Mrs. Dickinson did not, but a certain old lady, who stood on her lawn just where it was separated from the park, by a "Ha, ha!" did. She was clad in a short serge skirt, a holland jacket, and broad straw hat which had been tanned by many suns; she leant upon a stout oak stick, and as she watched the proceedings, to which the cry of hounds and the notes of the horn had attracted her attention, she muttered appreciative sounds.

"Funny thing, um; there's nothing odd about it, she might be a good-looking boy, and she sits on her pony as though she were part of it; a better tone too out of the horn than poor Hugo ever got, he was always a bit woolly. Now I wonder if she will remember to raise her hat."

Lavvy, with the hounds clustering round her pony, trotted up to the spot where the old lady stood, and Lady

Flora keenly watched the manner of her coming. Jack Morgan at a little distance as keenly observed the manner of her going, and then laughed quietly to himself.

Mrs. Dickinson, much impressed on hearing that the lady on the lawn was Lady Flora Parkfield, asked the reason of his mirth.

"Oh, nothing much," he replied, with the laughter in his voice. "You would probably not appreciate it, but *I've* seen for the first time in my life one woman raise her hat to another."

Lavvy had omitted no detail of her *rôle* as huntsman, she had raised her bowler hat and held it clear of her head for a second or two as she bade Lady Flora "Good morning". Then she pulled up her pony and sat talking easily to her ladyship with the butt of her whip on her thigh and the upper part against her shoulder, an exact counterpart of Ned and the second whip, who had taken up their positions wide on either hand.

"Good morning, my dear; I must congratulate you," Lady Flora exclaimed.

"Upon what, Lady Flora?" Lavvy inquired, annoyed with herself because her face would flush.

"Ah, well, everything; especially the pony, he's a picture. Where did you get him? Who's the lady yonder with Jack?"

Lady Flora did not wait for any answers, but turned round and blew a whistle, signalling something in semaphore fashion to a servant who appeared in answer to the summons and then hurried back into the house to reappear shortly with a huge black jack and tray of glasses.

"A Mrs. Dickinson, a friend of auntie's," Lavvy said when Lady Flora faced her again.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dickinson," her ladyship shouted. "Any friend of Miss Badsworth is welcome here, her name is quite sufficient introduction. Good morning, Jack! It makes me wish my riding days weren't over to see you all, and the hounds too, plenty of flesh to get off them, but it's

a good fault for a month or two yet; it's not so easy to put it on when the season's half over, but Joe Summers always knows what he is about. You shape well, very well, my dear." (To Lavvy.) "Now" (generally) "try a glass of the Casselton home-brewed—no brewers' beer here—it will give you all an appetite if you haven't got it. I wish I dared venture. Johnson, I think I will."

"Your ladyship will suffer for it," Johnson replied deprecatingly.

"Well, perhaps you are right, but young people always make me feel young."

The amber Casselton ale was dispensed. Lady Flora did most of the talking in what might have been supposed to be an aimless manner, but her keen eyes took in everything, down to the couples which hung from the saddles of Ned and the second whip, and they did not fail to observe that Mrs. Dickinson was no horsewoman.

"I shall see you again by-and-by, my dear. You'd better get on home, you'll have a long day," she said to Lavvy. Then she called her back when Jack and Mrs. Dickinson had moved off.

"Is that one of the——?" She pointed with her stick at Mrs. Dickinson's back.

Lavvy laughed and nodded assent.

"I thought so; I ain't often mistaken." And the old lady chuckled with evident self-satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PETER BECKFORD, in his *Thoughts upon Hunting*, writing a century and a quarter ago, apologises for his frontispiece in the following words, though why he should have affixed a frontispiece to letters to a friend does not appear :—

"You will rally me, perhaps, on the choice of my frontispiece, but why should not hunting admit the patronage of a lady? The ancients, you know, invoked Diana at setting out on the chase, and sacrificed to her on their return; is not this enough to show the propriety of my choice? At all events I assure myself that you will approve her attendants, Health and Contentment."

There would have been no necessity for any such apologia being uttered or written to Mr. Ogden-Hooper, the master of the Tinbury, or Phil Boulter, his huntsman, or George Grant, the huntsman of the Brackley, so vastly have things changed since Beckford's day; but as these three worthy persons stood in the large kennel paddock at Cranston with Joe Summers in his kennel coat, and twelve couples of young hounds around them, they were one and all impressed by the fact that unusual happenings had fallen upon the Cranston country.

One and all in their turn had dropped hints to Joe Summers, but the old man ignored them, so they gave their minds to the matter in hand and took a general view of the young entry before inspecting its members individually upon the flags. They stood together with observant eyes wandering over the moving black, white and tan. There was no mistaking the country gentleman in Mr. Ogden-Hooper, but to the ordinary observer the two huntsmen might have been

schoolmasters out of place owing to the selection of plain clothes which they had made. The sportsman would have noticed the peculiarly keen eyes which so frequently mark the huntsman who has risen to notoriety.

In reply to a question relating to a strong resemblance to one another in various hounds present, Joe Summers had stated that Mr. Badsworth had of late been very partial to the Benedict blood, whereupon a brisk disquisition arose upon the merits of that celebrated hound. Joe said nothing until presently appealed to he remarked oracularly :—

"Benedicts for pace, but when it comes to hunting and your horse is beat, give me Caterers," and the old man pointed with his whip.

There was the sound of a gate falling to, and first one hound and then another gazed wistfully in the direction of the sound with sterns which fanned slowly until motion was well-nigh suspended. There were anxious, expressive faces, cocked ears and heads carried on one side; in another moment, to the astonishment of the strangers, they were gone, and a chorus of welcoming voices came back across the stretch of grass, and no sound of rebuke escaped the lips of the old kennel huntsman as he calmly stood with his whip under his arm. All four men watched the coming of a lady wearing a sailor hat and long white kennel coat. They saw her stop as the hounds approached her, and swing the thong of her whip lightly in a semi-circle to stay the boisterous torrent, then she moved on with the hounds clustering round her, only an individual here or there throwing a joyous tongue.

It was a pretty picture, and it was some time before Mr. Ogden-Hooper took his eyes off it and asked, "The master?"

"No, sir, the huntsman," Joe Summers replied.

"Bless my soul! You don't say so!" Mr. Ogden-Hooper remarked, and then, raising his hat, advanced to meet the girl. He was not a lady's man, but Lavvy's quiet, easy manner, and an entire absence of swagger, took his fancy.

"THE MASTER?" "NO, SIR, THE HUNTSMAN."

"Good morning," she said, with just a slight accession of colour on her face, taking Mr. Ogden-Hooper's proffered hand and bending her head in the direction of the other men (she had a suspicion that they were criticising her, not as a woman, but as having to do with a kennel of hounds). "I'm afraid I interrupted you," she went on, "I meant to have been here earlier but I was delayed at the last moment. We ladies are new to our work, Mr. Ogden-Hooper, and as you well know, there is much to be learnt."

"Ah! Of course I've heard, but—hounds seem to know you well enough."

"Oh, yes, we are getting on, thanks to Summers."

The old man's hand went to his cap.

"Hounds weren't back in the kennel till close upon nine. You must be tired, ma'am."

The three men knew what he meant without need of explanation, and forthwith had another surreptitious look at the young lady.

"A nice level lot of young hounds as ever I saw, we shall have our work cut out to make our selection," Mr. Ogden-Hooper said as they walked towards the kennel. "Will you require a large entry?" He put the question without expecting a definite reply from Lavvy, but, thanks to Joe Summers, she could answer it.

"Only five couples. Uncle Hugo kept more hounds than he really wanted for two days a week."

"This is a niece, then," thought Mr. Ogden-Hooper. "All the better for you," he said aloud. "Young hounds double the work. I hope you will be able to stand it."

"I rather doubt it," Lavvy replied; "but it cannot be helped, it has to be attempted." She smiled up into Mr. Ogden-Hooper's grave face.

For a short distance they proceeded in silence, then that gentleman must have spoken his thoughts, for he said, "I'm hanged if I don't think you'll get through with it—in a way."

"I'm glad you qualified your remarks," the girl replied.

"It's a deuce of a job, you know."

"Yes, I know it is; please remember I didn't choose it."

For nearly an hour the united knowledge, and perhaps prejudice in some cases, of the judges was brought to bear, and when the number of hounds was reduced to half a score, there was much sucking of whip-handles.

Lavvy took down the final decisions, nature of award, name of person by whom the hound had been walked and name of hound. With a feeling of satisfaction she wrote Lady Flora Parkfield's name against Ferryman and Rector.

It had not been the custom for many outside the limit of those immediately concerned to attend the Cranston puppy show. Farmers and some landowners, together with those who had walked puppies, had been wont to drop in as certain persons do at large sales, more for the sake of getting their luncheon free rather than anything else. That function had entered the progressive state since the days when Hugo Badsworth first took up the reins of government. Rounds of beef and the best October brewing had been supplemented by cold salmon, elegant mayonnaise, and a variety of supernumerary dishes, to which was added what some of the guests still called "champaney wine". Curiosity on this celebrated occasion, when Miss Badsworth would preside as master, spread its tentacles far and wide; it induced many to run down to the country from town for the week-end. Perhaps the pessimistic view which was taken by Major Creswell of things in general, and champagne selected by a woman in particular, may also have had its effect. At all events when Miss Badsworth took the chair at one o'clock the large marquee was well filled.

At the hostess's request Jack Morgan had drawn up the toast list, and though Miss Badsworth remonstrated on its length, he assured her it was the sort of thing which people in and about Cranston liked. Little slips of paper were distributed by Jack to those who would be flattered by the attention, and the one or two who in the past imagined themselves aggrieved, and who in all probability would de-

velop similar prejudices in the future, were taken aside in order that to their content a toast might be entrusted to them.

"Please look after Mrs. Dickinson, Mr. Morgan," Lavvy said in a whisper, as she stepped by him to a seat half-way down the table where she would be supported on either side by a burly yeoman.

A shadow of disappointment passed over Jack's good-humoured face. "I hoped for better things," he said. "But never mind, I'll do it; she looks aggressive, but I have no doubt she feels stiff."

In his heart he once more wished Mrs. Dickinson at the bottom of the sea.

There was an easy dignity about Miss Badsworth as she sat at the head of the table which caused Lady Flora Parkfield to grunt approval.

"No, no, my dear," she had said, when requested to sit near her hostess. "Don't put me in high places. I'll go a little lower down; you will be well supported."

It so happened that she directly faced Mrs. Dickinson, by whose side Jack Morgan dropped into a chair.

Sir Gregory Sorter was on Miss Badsworth's right hand and Mr. Ogden-Hooper on her left. Major Creswell, too, was well up, but, his wife being present, he felt little inclination to spread himself. One spectre, from Lavvy's point of view, was at the feast. Victor Bickersdyke, who, as Jack Morgan had said, had taken a cottage in the neighbourhood in order the more readily to watch events, had come over, accompanied by a stranger, to note how his aunt got on and what prospect there was of her carrying out the requirements of the late Squire's Will.

He was surprised, as were many others, at her "conduct in the chair"; but then they did not consider that meetings possessed no terrors for Miss Badsworth, and the present occasion, though it introduced strange elements, had a reality about it which had sometimes been lacking in the past.

"I wish I knew more about it," she had said to Jack Morgan. "I am really totally ignorant of the subject which will predominate."

"Oh, never mind; stick to generalities," Jack had replied. "Keep in shallow water. If I might suggest, in proposing the prize winners, couple all who have walked puppies, and condole with them on the prevalence of distemper which has been very rife this season, and just say that all who hunt are indebted to them."

When Miss Badsworth rose and sent a few loyal words down to the far end of the tent in a clear, even and melodious voice, the good things of this life which had been dispensed were not alone responsible for the enthusiastic drinking "To the King!"

"I'm virtually a teetotaler," Mrs. Dickinson had said to Jack Morgan as he filled her glass.

"Rubbish!" he had replied. "There is no teetotalism allowed where fox-hunting is concerned."

"You don't say so!"

"I do; it's necessary, don't you know, to keep up the stamina. Why, you haven't forgotten Lady Flora's home-brewed ale?"

"What's that about me?" asked her ladyship opposite. Her ears were quick enough when she chose.

"We were just saying that without your home-brewed ale Mrs. Dickinson and I should never have got home. Our forefathers," he went on to his neighbour in a lower voice, "always drank one, and often two, bottles of port after hunting; we, their descendants, can't keep it up at that pace, but we have to do our level best."

"Really, Mr. Morgan, it seems to me to be a dreadful state of things. Consider the money that is spent. I have only seen a little of it, but all those dogs and men and horses, and this luncheon, just in order to terrify and kill one little animal."

"By Jove, it is, now you mention it!" Jack exclaimed. "Don't you think you could put in a few words of good

advice or remonstrance presently? You may never have such a chance again. You see those two men sitting there below Miss Lavinia?" (Mrs. Dickinson turned her head and Jack filled her glass and had put down the bottle before the lady could notice it.) "Those men are professional fox-killers—it's dreadful, isn't it? Hush! Miss Badsworth is up."

"A dooced fine woman, mind you," said a yeoman under his breath, as he thought, to his neighbour, when the first words of thanks to those who had walked puppies, and had offered to do so again, fell from the lips of the lady in the chair. Miss Badsworth did very well, though she was somewhat shaken by the rapturous applause of sturdy male voices when she apologised for the use of the term "mastership" as being more conventional and familiar to those present than any other.

"There are many things relating to the management of a pack of foxhounds concerning which I am woefully ignorant" (Major Creswell grunted), "but when I look round this table I feel comforted by the belief that there are others who, though their advantages are superior to mine, would be equally at a loss when it came to matters of detail." ("Hear! hear!" and laughter. Lady Flora looked at the Major and nodded.) "Amongst other things I have learnt how indebted I am to those who have walked puppies; and whilst I sincerely condole with those whose chances of special recognition to-day have been ruined by the serious epidemic of distemper which has prevailed so disastrously, I congratulate those who have sent in specimens of young foxhounds which I learn from the judges are quite up to the high standard for which the Cranston Hunt has been celebrated." (Cheers.) "I think I have had the pleasure of already making the acquaintance of the majority of those whom I may call benefactors, and if there are any whom I have been unable to visit as yet, I trust they will believe that the omission has been caused by distance and lack of time. I will read the list of the prize winners and then ask

you to drink the health of all those to whom, as I have said, we are so deeply indebted."

Mrs. Dickinson writhed mentally. If Miss Badsworth had suddenly received the gift of tongues, she (Mrs. Dickinson) could not have been more astonished or ignorant of her hostess's meaning.

Miss Badsworth left her seat, and, followed by the butler bearing handsome silver cups upon a tray, presented them personally to the prize winners.

"Do you mean to say that people actually take the trouble to teach these precious dogs to walk?" she asked Jack Morgan.

"To be sure; and those who walk fastest win the prizes; that's the difference between what we call a fast pack and a slow pack; when they come in they are handed over to the professional fox-catchers. They are humble descendants of the old gladiators who fought with beasts at Ephesus and elsewhere. I expect they would be afraid of lions and things, but when they are well mounted they are a pretty good match for the fox."

"I think it's dreadfully cruel, when—no; no more wine, thank you."

"You must let me put a little in your glass, these people would be terribly offended if you drank their health without that ceremony," Jack said, duly filling up the lady's glass.

Lady Flora Parkfield claimed the privilege, as it was a ladies' day, of being the first to respond; and amongst other things told the company, to the astonishment of Mrs. Dickinson, that she had had the honour in her time of walking twenty-seven couples of puppies for the Cranston Hunt, and had had the good fortune to lose but two couples by distemper and one hound by an accident, whereat the cheering was renewed.

Mr. Ogden-Hooper returned thanks for the judges, paying some neat compliments to Miss Badsworth (meaning her niece); and his colleagues, standing awkwardly the while, being no orators, sat down promptly during the rounds of

applause, neither could shouts nor view holloas draw from them aught but smiles.

Sir Gregory Sorter, amidst many ejaculations from Lady Flora, proposed "The Master," cannoning off the Scylla of the past into the Charybdis of the present before he got fairly into smooth water.

Miss Badsworth replied, wisely omitting to dwell on the peculiarities of her position beyond remarking that it was one of extreme difficulty for a woman, and asking her audience and those who resided in the country to make allowances for her and give her time.

Every one was in good humour, tongues were unloosed and permission had been given to smokers to light up, when Jack Morgan, having asked leave to propose a toast, rose and rapped on the table with a spoon.

"Miss Badsworth, ladies and gentlemen," he began, when the cheers which greeted his uprising had subsided, "Lady Flora Parkfield has reminded us that this is a ladies' day; we are grateful to her ladyship, though I think we should scarcely have forgotten the fact. Not only are we honoured by a lady in the chair, but this board is graced by the presence of a larger number of the fair sex than I ever remember seeing on any like occasion." (Cheers.) "That they should rally round Miss Badsworth and support her in what I may call her arduous task was only to be expected." ("Hear! hear!" from Lady Flora.) "But apart from that I feel sure that we men are well aware of the extent to which we are gainers. In proposing, therefore, the toast of 'The Ladies'" (hearty cheers drowned the words which followed, and some minutes elapsed before Jack Morgan could resume) "there is one lady present well known with the—I should say in philanthropic circles, who is apparently so much interested in matters which are entirely novel to her that, I am credibly informed, she accompanied the hounds at exercise in the early hours of this morning." (In vain Lavvy tried to catch his eye; he looked everywhere save in her direction.) "I think, therefore, it is only just that I should, in asking you

to drink to the ladies, couple the toast with the name of Mrs. Dickinson, who is sitting at my right hand." Such a chorus of voices arose as the male members of the company drank the toast standing, that Mrs. Dickinson, for the moment, felt her usual confidence desert her; perhaps it was the champagne which Jack had insidiously supplied that made things look unsteady. Her mind appeared to be a blank until Jack whispered with a solemn face, "Now's your time, give it 'em hot; they will take a lot of convincing".

Then Mrs. Dickinson rose upon what, momentarily, seemed to be someone else's legs. The sound of her own voice, which she loved, albeit the tones were not quite familiar, together with an aside from Jack to "go it," restored her confidence, notwithstanding the fact that Lady Flora opposite, who scented trouble, leant back in her chair and regarded the speaker through the pair of glasses on the nine-inch handle which she reserved for such occasions. Perhaps nothing puts people on such good terms with themselves as a round of applause; we are told that it is the absence of this which makes agitators such failures in the House of Commons. However that may be, Mrs. Dickinson felt such a sense of superiority, owing to the cheers which greeted her opening words of thanks (and perhaps the champagne), that the spirit of antagonism rose within her. It would probably be a very mild sort of a world, the world of debate, if this sentiment were absent. Whether Mrs. Dickinson displayed wisdom in casting a firebrand into the midst of an otherwise enthusiastic and well-contented gathering, simply for the purpose of creating an explosion, is another matter.

"I am sorely at a loss," she said, when she had duly thanked the company, "to account for so much enthusiasm being displayed, as it has been to-day, over such an unworthy and cruel object as the pursuit and death of one little animal—a fox." The open mouths, the quick gasps of astonishment, and withal the sudden deathly stillness which followed, were sufficient to damp the ardour of the bravest orator. Jack Morgan's "That's right, don't be afraid; jump

on them now they are down," in a stage whisper, hardly served to stem the tide of depression. The champagne came to the rescue, and Mrs. Dickinson dashed forward as might a leader of a forlorn hope or an enthusiast who seeks to stamp out a vice by means of denunciations, when the friendly and sympathetic hand upon the shoulder and one kind word would lead where it could not drive.

The majority of the guests were looking at their plates and feeling uncomfortable. Three were not. Miss Badsworth at the head of the table made no sign, but gazed calmly in front of her; she had heard similar things before. Lady Flora opposite looked fixedly and unflinchingly at the speaker with just a symptom of cynical disapproval, which was half merriment, at the corners of her lips; and Joe Summers, considerably further off, put a hand behind his ear.

In the well-known, one-sided arguments of the Humanitarian Society, which forgets that thousands of wild animals would not enjoy any existence at all were it not for their preservation, and is ignorant of such a thing as true sport and fairplay, Mrs. Dickinson dealt with her audience, and went so far as to describe a "fox chase," as she called it, terminating with "innocent blood dripping from cruel fangs of infuriated dogs".

Not a sound issued from the astonished company beyond a gurgle from somewhere in Jack's neighbourhood. Mrs. Dickinson had worked herself up; if she went down it should be with the banner of her creed over her as a pall.

"For this purpose, and only this, we appear to have met to-day, to reward those who, instead of favouring their fellow-creatures, have wasted their time in guiding the tottering footsteps of one class of dumb creatures in order that they may be more successfully hounded on to the destruction of another class."

When Mrs. Dickinson sat down there was an ominous pause. Who was to put things right? Major Creswell's ejaculation under his breath, "The woman's drunk," travelled sufficiently far to be audible to several. Lady Flora

closed her glasses with as much snap as they would make, put her hands upon the table and rose with considerably more effort than was actually required. She felt that if this was one of Miss Badsworth's friends that lady's popularity was at stake; so she looked up the table and down the table before she said a word, and no one would have guessed from the dawn of a smile which hovered on her humorous face that she was within an ace of giving Mrs. Dickinson a bit of her mind.

"I've always heard," she said, when she had addressed the chair, "that when *men* talk on subjects which they know nothing about, they make—er—fools of themselves, and I am perfectly sure under similar conditions I should do the same." (Loud laughter and cries of "No, no!") "I should, indeed, and so I am going to let the Humanitarian Society pass. I will only say that horses, forage, meal, servants' wages and a vast circulation of money in the country are some of the accompaniments of a 'fox chase'." (Cheers and laughter.) "Now, there is a man down yonder to whom all who are associated with the Cranston Hunt are indebted, and have been for many years, Joseph Summers, a man who but for a serious accident would be still capable of taking his place in the field. I cannot help feeling that the description which we have just listened to must have sorely puzzled him. At all events I feel it an honour to propose his health with musical honours."

And the old lady led those honours herself.

Lady Flora had gauged her audience to a nicety, so with her glass in her hand she stood whilst they sang themselves into good-humour and cheered themselves hoarse. A whiff of new-mown hay from the park beyond pervaded the tent in the silence which followed, and a ray of sunlight struggled through the canvas above and fell upon Joe Summers' silvery hair as he stood waiting for the subsidence of the cheers which were renewed on his rising to his feet.

The old man's voice shook a little at first as he thanked the company in general and Lady Flora in particular. Irre-

spective of circumstances he paid a tribute to his late master, and informed his audience of the exact number of puppy shows he had attended and the blow it was to him when his accident precluded his carrying the horn any longer if required. Then his eyes became fixed on Mrs. Dickinson, and there was the same expression of keenness in them that there had wont to be when in time past he had gauged the progress of events by the hounds which were running at the head of the pack.

"I think if the lady yonder saw a bit of fox-hunting she'd alter from what she told us just now. Bricks and mortar hunting and accounts in the newspapers are well in their way, and are easy work because you can always catch your fox. We've never been so full of blood that I've seen it drippin', as she says, leastways unless a hound got a bad bite before the fox was smothered by the rest. She'd find hounds would get careless and slack without blood, though I'm bound to say, unless you're pretty quick, it's a job to get a pack to break a fox up if they're blown or can't get a drop of water if the weather's close and mild; and there are hounds, good hounds too, which won't take any hand in the job at all. Maybe there are folks like the lady who think when you've found your fox, you goes on till you kills him, but there are others who know that there are days when the further you go the further you're left. I think if the lady found herself down in Allington pastures with a tired horse, a flock of sheep in front and a rainstorm comin' on, she'd find the chances were there'd be little croolty, as she calls it, come out of that hunt; there ain't much pleasure in being through wet, and females minds it more than men. I don't think the lady meant any harm," he added consolingly, "but it seems a pity she should have said what she did without knowin' a bit more, because then—well, she wouldn't have said it!" (Laughter.) "Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you."

Miss Badsworth promptly closed the sitting with "Success to Fox-Hunting".

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNACCUSTOMED champagne in the middle of the day is apt to produce a reaction which militates against good temper.

Mrs. Dickinson, failing to see that her best policy was to hold her tongue, commenced an attack upon Miss Badsworth as soon as that lady had taken a gracious leave of her guests.

"I never saw such a ridiculous fuss made over so unworthy an object," she said as they walked towards the house.

Miss Badsworth, now fully alive to her responsibilities, and at the same time somewhat fatigued, did not feel the truth of this remark when regarded by the light of her own experience. Moreover, she felt annoyed by Mrs. Dickinson's want of tact, and added to this there were nearly forty acres of hay in various stages of making and carrying which needed her occasional presence, though naturally she was ignorant of many necessary details.

"No?" she queried. "I daresay not; but then you cannot be expected to take in at first sight the many requirements of the situation."

"I consider it a most unwomanly business," Mrs. Dickinson rejoined.

"That is just what it is."

"As for your niece——"

"Kindly leave Lavvy out of the question; what she does, she does on my behalf."

"Oh, of course; but I confess you surprise me, Miss Badsworth. I always thought——"

"And so did I; but I find—and I don't mind confessing

it—I was mistaken. There are things which belong to men and men only; theoretically they may have no existence, but practically they are evident enough. My brother was perfectly right in what he said, but I heartily wish he had not seen fit to give me such plain proof of his words. What would you do, for instance, with forty acres of hay?"

Mrs. Dickinson paused before she replied.

"I think I should leave such things to the bailiff."

"There you are, you see; he is a man, and knows all about the work. I do not think one can learn about hay out of books. Haymaking is a matter of experience—it mustn't be too green and it mustn't be too dry, so they tell me; and like your remarks just now, anything one says is apt to prove one's ignorance."

"I feel sure that *I* said nothing which displayed ignorance," Mrs. Dickinson retorted. "I am disappointed, sadly disappointed with you, Miss Badsworth."

Miss Badsworth's customary good-humour was fast waning.

"Please recollect," she said, "I did not ask you to come. You fail to understand the circumstances of my case; we had better not quarrel. I will order the brougham in time for the four o'clock train. Good-bye."

Mrs. Dickinson was so taken aback that she shook her hostess' proffered hand mechanically, and words failed her as that lady disappeared into the house.

"Lavvy," Miss Badsworth said, when she had found her niece already clad in her riding habit, one of the patents, "I cannot put up with Mrs. Dickinson any longer. I have ordered the brougham at half-past three; would you mind——"

"Seeing her clear of the house, auntie? Not a bit. It will be easier for me to do, for she and I are not mixed up in any projects. Go and have a ride round the Upper Cowleaze, you will be all the better for it. Auntie, you make a splendid chairman or chairwoman, I don't wonder they want you up in town. I have done nothing but envy you all the luncheon time,"

Miss Badsworth smiled and patted her niece's short-cut hair. "I wish I knew half as much as you do, my dear."

"That wouldn't be much, auntie. By the way, I had an interview with Victor just now."

"And what had he to say?"

"First, he made me an offer, which is a frequent occurrence, and I refused him, which is equally frequent; but the important matter was that he has looked out our successor, or rather my successor, in Captain Majendie, that gentleman he brought with him. Victor took it as a matter of course that you would permit his friend to have access to the kennels in order that the understudy might be able to take up the part in December. It seems to be all beautifully cut and dried. I told Victor he had better write to you, which appeared to astonish him very much."

There was a flash in Lavvy's eyes, and an expression on her mobile countenance which Miss Badsworth had little difficulty in reading. Moreover, there was just a shadow of doubt as to what her aunt would do in the girl's voice.

"I call it a piece of gross impertinence," Miss Badsworth replied in a firm, even tone. "Who is Captain Majendie? If Victor writes to me I shall in reply tell him that I shall permit no one to interfere in the kennels until I am obliged to do so. I wish your father could have come up to-day, Lavvy."

"Dear old dad! Don't you think he stayed away in order to give you a perfectly free hand? It was your first public appearance as a master, auntie, and dad considers fairplay one of the principal virtues."

"Lavvy, dear, if we do make a mess of it all we cannot help it, we will do it in our own way. I trust this Captain Majendie isn't going to be another thorn in our sides."

There was just an extra tinge of colour on Lavvy's face as she replied:—

"I'll find out all about him before long, auntie."

Lavvy adopted the *rôle* of sweet but armed neutrality as she poured out tea for Mrs. Dickinson prior to her departure,

She permitted that lady to air her favourite theories without contravening them.

"I wish," Mrs. Dickinson said, just as the wheels of the brougham crushed the gravel by the front door, "I wish we could get you to apply your energetic character to our cause."

"What cause?"

"The equality, not to say superiority, of women to men."

"But I couldn't do it, not, at least, with a clear conscience. There is one point upon which a man displays a superiority which no amount of argument can dispel. There is the brougham, you mustn't be late for the train."

"Tell me, what is the point?" Mrs. Dickinson asked eagerly as she rose.

"Will you promise to think it over and try to find a way out?"

"Certainly."

"Pockets. I have seven at least, and there may be more which I have not discovered, in my riding kit (not this one) instead of the miserable *one* which only a trained pickpocket can find."

"That could be got over, in fact——"

"Not without adopting one universal costume. Can you fancy yourself in a conventional dress-suit airing yourself on the hearthrug before dinner?"

There was a merry gleam in Lavvy's eyes as she contemplated Mrs. Dickinson's figure, but do what she would that lady could not resent it. "You are frivolous," she said.

"Not at all. My opinion at the present moment is, it is better to be a true woman than a sham man; but you must hurry up. Good-bye."

Mrs. Dickinson sniffed, for she felt a sense of being worsted, yet somehow Lavvy's words kept recurring to her mind accompanied by the hum of the rubber-tyred wheels.

. . . . . .

Later in the afternoon Lavvy rode over to interview the keeper at Hawkfield, an individual who required careful handling seeing that in him was vested much power of pro-

viding sport or the reverse, for there were at least two litters of cubs on his domain. The mission on the whole was successful.

Stephen Harris, though a morose-mannered man, had unbent considerably under Lavvy's genial influence. She asked to see his young birds which she had heard made a wonderful show, and congratulated him upon them.

"Oh, I'll do very well if I ain't ate up by those messes of foxes."

"If any one in the world could show *both*," Lavvy said, "it ought to be you."

Stephen Harris pondered.

"So you're going to hunt the hounds, are you, mum? Lor', you'll tire to death, messing about after them."

"Very likely; but I shall do, if you good folk will only help me."

Then she put a seal upon Harris's doubts by visiting his wife.

On the return journey the Banker, on excellent terms with himself, cantered across a large pasture field with the long easy stride which made him such an excellent hack; he was used to short cuts, and popped cleverly over the low stile which barred the way into a shady grass-grown lane. Jack Morgan turned an adjacent corner at the same moment.

"The very person I wanted to see!" Lavvy exclaimed eagerly as she reined in the pony.

Possibly Jack would have preferred more of species than genus in the tone of her voice. He raised his cap and replied:—

"Nothing like being in the right place when wanted, as I believe I remarked once before. I wouldn't have missed that pretty sight yonder for the world. I saw you coming across the field, and I hurried up for I knew the stile. You are a wonderful little chap" (patting the Banker's chest), "and you——" looking at the girl with honest admiration.

"Be serious, and don't talk nonsense," Lavvy interrupted. "It's an important matter."

"I am serious, and I was about to speak words of truth and soberness."

"You behaved shamefully at the luncheon."

"I did? You told me to look after Mrs. Dickinson, and I did so."

"But you urged her on to make herself foolish."

"How was I to know she didn't, at her age, know how much champagne she could take with impunity? Is she very bad after it? I've heard that soda water——"

Jack's solemn face was too much for Lavvy.

"She has left Cranston," she said laughing.

Jack's cap went high in the air to be caught deftly on the point of his stick.

"Well, don't do it again."

"I won't; at all events till next time."

"Now, I want to ask an important question."

"So do I," Jack replied, looking her in the eyes.

"Who is Captain Majendie?"

Jack's countenance fell a trifle, and Lavvy noticed it, but he recovered himself immediately and asked:—

"What has he been doing?"

"He hasn't been doing anything, but he appears to be a friend of Victor's and wants to do a great deal, in fact, to be my understudy and have access to the kennels so as to take on the hounds if auntie has to give them up."

"The deuce he does!" Jack exclaimed, at the same time executing a progressive bramble shoot with his stick and then looking up at the girl. "He couldn't do it."

"Hunt the hounds?"

"I doubt it, but I mean be your understudy. What a day's work you have had, and now here you are as fresh as a daisy, and——"

"Do be sensible, Mr. Morgan, you haven't answered my question about Captain Majendie."

"Let me see, what was it? Who is he? I believe he was a soldier officer in a cavalry regiment and left on account of some little difficulty about a horse warranty. I under-

stand he has been trying to get a pack of hounds with everything found. They say he rides hard, and no doubt can holloa and swear, which some committees think sufficient qualification, but up to date he doesn't seem to have been successful."

"Victor is going to write and ask auntie to let him have free access to the kennels."

"And what is auntie, I mean Miss Badsworth, going to say in reply?"

"When I told her she said without a moment's hesitation that she——"

"Would see him anywhere first?"

"Well, words to that effect."

"Under the circumstances I do not think that she could possibly do better."

"What is there against Captain Majendie?"

"Nothing particular, that I know of."

Lavvy smiled at Jack's effort to maintain a neutral position.

"What is there you *don't* know of?" she asked, laughing. "Mr. Morgan, I can see with half an eye you don't like Captain Majendie. Why?"

"Miss Lavinia Badsworth" (with a certain amount of imitation of Lavvy's tone), "I hardly know. Prejudice, perhaps. I do feel prejudiced against him. It's like this: though your cousin may be troublesome and annoying to your aunt, he personally won't hunt or take interest in the hounds, so he won't bother you."

"Never mind about me."

"But that's just it, I do mind about you. Majendie is the sort of man to worry you exceedingly; if an inch is given him he will take fifty yards, and if nothing is given him he will take it just the same, he's an irrepressible sort of bounder; and if Bickersdyke backs him, as I fear he is inclined to do, he will always be at your elbow and trying to interfere."

"Then you *do* know something about Captain Majendie."

"You asked what I knew *against* him," Jack said, looking so fixedly at the girl that in spite of all her efforts her colour rose.

She made a charming picture sitting easily on her pony with a framing of sprays of delicate dog-roses and flickering lights and shadows behind her. Jack took it all in, and was sensible of a subtle influence which did not consist entirely of the drowsy hum of insects and the scent of new-mown hay; he put his left hand on the Banker's withers, and an eager smile stole over his face.

"Look here," he said, "you are far too good for all this; you will work like a slave and probably knock yourself up, you have no idea of what you are undertaking. In another six weeks or so, if the harvest is early, you will have to begin in the small hours of the morning and go whether you feel fit or not. Jack it up, Lavvy, and——"

Then the surrounding stillness was broken. A lonely donkey, mindful of the hour when the cart-horses would be turned out, lifted up his voice and complained because in the haymaking time his companions were long in coming.

For a moment Jack Morgan felt annoyed, but the noble effort, ineffectual though it was, made by Lavvy to suppress her mirth was too much for him, he laughed aloud and she laughed with him; it made all the difference, the laugh—he felt it—was not *at* him.

"Mr. Morgan," Lavvy said, after a little pause, with a peculiar pleading note in her voice, "don't make the work harder for me. I want to stand by auntie, and what is more, I intend to do so; you can help me immeasurably or you can hinder me."

Jack's countenance fell, but in a moment the expression changed, all the heartiness of his nature was in his voice as he replied:—

"By the shade of Balaam, I won't do the latter."

Lavvy gathered up her reins, stretched out her hand and said "Thanks—Jack!" And the Banker cantered away.

Was it his Christian name, or did she notify her departure to "the Reformer" sitting close by?

Jack Morgan didn't trouble to decide, for though there had been a shade of gravity on the girl's face, there was a light in her eyes which she couldn't conceal.

He threatened the donkey's head, now thrust through a gap, with his stick, but he forbore to strike.

"I think I know what she means," he said to himself. "Well, I'll keep an eye on the Captain and his mate and put a spoke in their wheel if I can. What a dear little girl it is! Talk of woman's superiority, if it exists anywhere, it exists there."

He stopped and listened to the Banker's retreating footfalls on the turf, and then resumed his walk, whistling softly as he went.

CHAPTER XXV.

"PERHAPS a recruit might chance to shoot great General Boneypar-tee."

So sang the poet somewhere about the date of the Peninsular War, and of course it was within the bounds of possibility.

Mrs. Barlow was the recruit, and her random shot "If you don't live different, Mr. Bickersdyke, the chances are you never will inherit nothing".

Whether it was the heavy charge of negatives which drove the argument home, like repeated blows of a hammer, matters not; the fact remains that it brought Victor Bickersdyke up all standing.

The soundest arguments fail to convince an individual who is weak enough to allow his libations to undermine his common-sense. "Very good advice, I know you are right," he will say in reply to warnings patent to every one but himself; but however deep the reasoning, the thrusts will fail in their effect.

Victor Bickersdyke had no familiar friend in whom he trusted immediately at hand. His legacy in the present, and his dead certainty, as he thought, in the future, had destroyed any carking cares in the shape of ways and means. He was often wont to air his prospects in the bar parlour of the Duchy Arms, and the shadow of ill-usage in the past, rather than the substance of many neglected opportunities, hovered round him, until he felt justified in being satisfied with the prospect of turning the tables.

On the occasion when Mrs. Barlow's warning took the form of the sound words mentioned above, Victor lapsed into

momentary silence, watching the glass quivering in his shaking hand which was raised half-way to his lips.

Yes, it did shake, and had done so for some considerable time; perhaps he had not noticed it; we become familiar with ills that come upon us gradually till we fail to observe the increase of their power; the fact was borne in upon him now.

"I'm not sure you aren't right, Mrs. Barlow," he said in the undecided tone of a person who is weighing a difficulty beyond the actual radius of the conversation.

Bickersdyke could recollect the days when his art was his delight, when he had visions of rising to the highest eminence to be attained by skill and labour; then came the disappointments, and instead of meeting them like a man, he had sought to drown them by means of an ally that had gradually become his tyrant—the octopus which had twined its tentacles around him. Now it was only by an increasing libation that he could woo the goddess of energy at all. If years ago he had only had what had fallen to his lot now, he would have—— Why couldn't the members of his family have taken him up and given him a helping hand? They had not done so; it was their fault; now at last he had come out on top, and remembering the past, would listen to no compromise if it were proposed. He was only half a Badsworth, perhaps not that; he was, in fact, as weak as his father had been before him.

"I'm not sure you aren't right, Mrs. Barlow," he repeated, as though nearly five minutes had not elapsed since he made the remark previously. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf; this will be my last evening here. It would be a pity if I didn't make them all sit up."

The "all" comprised the members of the Badsworth family.

"I don't believe the Squire or Miss Lavvy ever hurt anybody in their lives, or ever would," Mrs. Barlow said, when Bickersdyke had reviewed the hardships of his lot by means of a circuitous train of argument.

"Don't you? You are too kind-hearted, Mrs. Barlow. Why has Miss Lavvy gone to Cranston to help my aunt as secretary or something if it isn't to keep me out? However, she will sing a different tune by-and-by, you see if she doesn't, when I'm master. I don't know that I shall give her a chance, though she is a good sort of girl."

"Perhaps she won't give you one," Mrs. Barlow replied shortly. Miss Lavvy was a great favourite. "Such things have happened. I wouldn't make too sure; I'd wait till I *was* master."

"My dear Mrs. Barlow," Bickersdyke said, forgetting his resolution and holding out his glass for Lucy to replenish it, "there's no earthly doubt of my coming into my rights in December next. Ask Tom, he knows something about the business; they might just as well suppose that I who hardly ever was on a horse in my life could hunt the hounds for a month or even a day as expect my aunt to do it. Besides which—I'm pretty well posted in what goes on—I hear there's some one to whom my aunt has given the job."

"Maybe it's to get 'em handy," Tom said from the vantage ground of his chair, whence he could bestow a placid but knowing look at the ceiling.

What Summers had said relating to Ned Barlow's reticence was perfectly true, yet in answer to sundry inquiries he had dropped dark hints in a letter, under the seal of secrecy; thumbs-crews might have squeezed the truth out of Mr. Barlow, senior, but no minor coercive power, and, fortunately, those instruments of torture had become obsolete. The ceiling had heard much ever since it had last been whitewashed, but it could be relied upon to hold its peace, which was a pity for otherwise it might have been entertaining.

"Well, I intend to go up into that neighbourhood shortly, just to keep an eye on things. There's Mr. John Morgan to be considered, and some one ought to be there to see he does his duty as executor; he's a trifle too familiar at Cranston to please me."

"I'm sure he seemed a nice sort of gentleman when he

was down here," Mrs. Barlow said, taking upon her the defence of the absent.

"Very likely; that's why I'm not going to give him a chance with Miss Lavvy."

Bickersdyke finished the contents of his glass at a gulp and eyed Mrs. Barlow as though seeking the weak spot in an adversary's defence. That any one should presume to dictate to Miss Lavvy, or lay down the law respecting that young lady's future, produced the same effect upon Mrs. Barlow as "the shouting of the captains" did upon the war-horse of old. Mrs. Barlow took the general and superficial view of her sex as beheld from her own standpoint of female capacity.

"You had far best leave Miss Lavvy's choice to herself," she said.

Bickersdyke pushed his glass across the table in Lucy's direction; he was getting into the argumentative stage.

"My dear Mrs. Barlow," he said, "I've always supposed you to be a sensible woman; what becomes of the chances of choice in the hands of a woman when the scales of fortune are all in favour of one side? Love in a cottage with bread and cheese is all very well in the theory of poets, but I doubt if there is a woman who would take it if roast beef and plum pudding were offered as an alternative."

"That's where you are wrong, Mr. Bickersdyke; you'll find a woman will make her choice just where her fancy leads her, and maybe it won't have nothing to do with money. There is no manner of doubt that money and comfort are very good things, but you'll find when a woman makes her choice she doesn't necessarily consider either one or the other. Why, you haven't got to look far——"

Mrs. Barlow stopped; she suddenly recollected that she was getting on dangerous ground, for her illustration was about to be taken from the case of a neighbour who had thrown in her lot with a drunken ne'er-do-well who beat her, rather than give her hand to the highly respectable son of a well-to-do corn factor.

"Anyway, I shall stop in the neighbourhood of Cranston and see fairplay," Bickersdyke said, with the confidence of one whom whisky had emboldened.

Mrs. Barlow couldn't deny herself another shot; Bickersdyke's self-confidence aggravated her.

"I suppose Mr. Morgan has a niceish little place up there from what I hear," she said.

Why Victor had regarded Jack Morgan as an impecunious person he didn't know; he couldn't tell now whether Mrs. Barlow was right or wrong.

"But it won't compare with Cranston," he replied. "Cranston's worth over eight thousand a year."

"Well, let be how it will, Mr. Bickersdyke, I would turn over that new leaf, if I were you."

Mrs. Barlow had the advantage of a retreat on the excuse of some household duty, of which she promptly availed herself.

Bickersdyke stated his belief that she was right, and had his glass refilled in order to consider the best manner in which the reform could be carried out. At closing time he staggered home as usual, with a vague idea that he had formed a "gooish reslushin".

. . . . . .

The steamy mist of a summer's dawn was rolling slowly landward from the rocky inlet entitled Tordon Bay before an easterly draught of air. There must have been a thick fog in the Channel, for every two minutes the mournful hoot of the siren at the lighthouse four miles away boomed its warning in reply to some steamer whose skipper was evidently anxious to know where he was, or to make others aware of his own proximity. The men on the beach of the cove making ready to launch their boats in order to haul their lobster pots, were unanimously of opinion that the weather would be fine and the day hot. The sound of their voices came up to the higher ground clear and distinct, together with the swish of the rising tide upon the shingle.

The veil was lifted slowly, and fold after fold retreated

over the cliffs, rolled back before the advancing rays of the newly risen sun.

As Nature revealed her beauties there may have been other things besides man which were vile, to wit, the remains of the thresher-shark which lay at the western extremity of the beach and had been a six days' wonder until human olfactory nerves could stand it no longer, bringing in some slight recompense to the men whose nets it had seriously damaged.

At any rate Victor Bickersdyke added nothing to the scene when he became dimly conscious of a mouth as dry as the Great Sahara and, as he thought, Mrs. Barlow hooting monotonously to him through a steam siren, "If you don't live different perhaps you mayn't never inherit nothing".

If the drunkard finds some degree of satisfaction in intoxication, and such must undoubtedly be the case, it must be sorely discounted by the subsequent reaction.

Victor Bickersdyke had long since learnt to dread the horrors of the morning, and it was his usual custom to steady himself with a hair of the dog that had bitten him. On this occasion he paused before he rose to search for the black bottle which usually reposed in a cupboard hard by. There was no doubt he was getting shaky; more than once he imagined he saw something move in the darker corners of the room; then he looked at the window; a tinge of blue was already making itself visible through the mist. The boom of the siren sounded weird and depressing. "Curse the thing," Victor said, and then some objects passed and repassed the window, shadowy against the sky; another and another. Victor tried to count them, but they came from different directions, and he got confused and his eyes ached. Again the siren sounded, and it was too much for the wretched artist's nerves. "Jim-jams, by all that's holy!" he muttered, and covered his head with the bed-clothes, whilst a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

Mrs. Barlow's words recurred to him; something must be

done; he would consult the doctor, but in the meantime he must get something to enable him to make the journey—just a taste, only a taste, of whisky. When he tottered to the cupboard the first portion of the leaf had been turned over for him, the cupboard was as bare as Mother Hubbard's —no, the black bottle was there, but it was empty.

"Curse the woman; she's been at it again," he said aloud as he seated himself disconsolately upon his bed. He couldn't remember very clearly what he had done on the previous evening, but the impression remained that there was something in the bottle when he had seen it last.

That Maria Baldwyn's (his landlady's) man had had "another of his attacks" overnight he did not know.

Victor Bickersdyke's eyes wandered despairingly to the window once more. Suddenly he arose, more briskly than before, and leaned out; the air was fresh and cool, but that was not responsible entirely for the sensation of gratitude and relief such as frequently fills the waker from a dream of terror. Gulls, gulls, not jim-jams! those shadowy objects which had alarmed his shaken nerves. There they were, circling high up in the thinning mist—sea-gulls.

Victor took courage and a strong cup of tea.

"Not a drop of spirits till evening, and then only one tot," he said to himself.

What a weary day it was, notwithstanding assiduous preparations for departure; but Mrs. Barlow's random remark was ever present and burnt itself into Victor's mind.

His hands were shaky, but he clung desperately to his determination.

. . . . . .

It so happened that when Victor Bickersdyke took up his quarters at the Crown and Cushion, in the small town of Allington, whither he had gone in order to prospect for a residence in the neighbourhood of Cranston, Captain Rufus Majendie had at the moment a room at the same hostelry.

He had learned at his club that disaster of some sort had fallen on the Cranston Hunt, and in view of possibilities

he had journeyed down in case a committee of the hunt, which he supposed existed, might be in want of a master for the coming season. Committees in a hole were apt to be liberal, and to put up with poor qualifications provided that *some one* would undertake the responsibility and save them trouble.

Captain Majendie had little to offer, but he traded on the fact that people in a difficulty were not very particular.

The first blow to his scheme was dealt when he found how matters stood—that there was no committee. Then fortune favoured him, for in the smoking-room of the Crown and Cushion he met Victor Bickersdyke.

Victor was only too glad to air his prospects and find a ready listener.

"You think, then, that Miss Badsworth will fail to fulfil the requirements of the Will," Captain Majendie remarked, when Bickersdyke paused.

"Certain of it as that I am sitting here."

"Then you will come into a nice property. Of course you will keep on the hounds?"

"No; I shall get rid of the lot—lock, stock and barrel."

"Surely that would be a pity. You see," the Captain said insinuatingly, "there will be all sorts of opinions on the matter if Miss Badsworth has to relinquish her claim; and being master of a pack of hounds would enable you to get over the adverse views, and people soon forget, if they have a reason for forgetting."

"But I know nothing about hunting, and care less," Bickersdyke said.

"But that doesn't matter; lots of people do the same. You shouldn't throw away the position, M.F.H. may not mean much to you, but it's astonishing what others think of it. You've only got to get some good man to do the work. I came down here thinking to find a committee and offer my services; there is no committee, so I'll offer them to you. It isn't like having to buy, everything is cut and dried, and the position you will hold will amply repay you

for the expense of keeping things up. For five hundred a year I will see to all the practical part."

The Captain was pleasant in manner when he chose, could make himself agreeable as a companion, played a good game of billiards and was an adept at bridge. Victor said he would think the matter over, but Majendie, who summed up his new friend as a weak and pliable person if worked properly, went to bed well assured that it only required a little tact to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. And so it happened that within three days a compact was made in writing between the two.

. . . . . .

"The old lady says 'No,' and she says it rather curtly. She 'will authorise no person of any sort to have access to the kennels, or to interfere in any way with the arrangements she sees fit to make'. There's the letter."

Victor handed the note to Majendie, when the latter, who had rooms at the Crown and Cushion, called at Fernley Cottage (which Victor had taken) two days after the puppy show.

"You've put your aunt's back up somehow," Majendie said as he handed the missive back. "Well, we must wait and trust to getting an opening later when the hunting begins. Your cousin seems to be an extraordinary young woman, as full of energy as they make 'em; but, bless you, I doubt any woman standing the work even for a time."

"I shall soon alter all that when she marries me; she's a bit snubby just now, but that will all change when the wheel of fortune goes round. As for setting my aunt's back up, of course I have. I'm the sword of Damocles, and by Jove I'll descend when the time comes. That sort of thing doesn't make one one's aunt's favourite nephew."

Majendie mentally wrote Victor down an ass, but he was the key to the position; though more abstemious than he had been, there were times when he broke out after the manner of his kind. He must be watched lest he killed

himself before his time, or jeopardised popularity by getting into some trouble.

"There is nothing to be done here during this hot weather," he said. "Every one is away, or leaving. What do you say to a run to Homburg or Biarritz? They won't begin cubbing till September."

Victor promptly said "No". But as Majendie refrained from argument the plan gradually presented itself in an attractive light, and Victor recollected that Jack Morgan had said he was going to Cowes. In the end he took the line of having proposed the plan.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WITH the exception of one brief holiday which Miss Badsworth spent at Cromer and Lavvy in Cornwall, which relaxation they took at separate times, the two ladies stuck to their work with unremitting diligence.

"Without practical experience, Lavvy, I would never have believed that the amount of business in the country requiring personal superintendence could exist. I feel quite grateful that I did not realise it at first, for I should have felt more despondent than I did. Grimes certainly is not an optimistic personage; at this moment I am in a dilemma, I have to wish for rain for the roots and fine weather for the early harvest." Miss Badsworth, in her riding habit, had cast herself into an easy-chair and was fanning herself with her hat.

"If you have to wish for either, auntie, wish for rain," her niece said, looking up from her journal, which she religiously kept. "Things are getting burnt up, and the ground is as hard as iron. I have been looking through Uncle Hugo's diaries and find he used to begin cub-hunting quite early in September in some years, I suppose it depended on the season; I can't find his hunting diary for this year, or the original copy of *Beckford;* Mr. Morgan says he has often seen the latter on this table. I have been through all the bookshelves twice. Look at these complaints of losses by foxes. It's true nobody has lost a flock of sheep yet, but it's rather wonderful if all these reports are correct. There's this old horror, Mr. Silas Tucker; he says Mrs. Tucker has lost three pens of prize fowls, and I don't believe there is a single fox on his estate."

"How little people who hunt know of the work which has to be done in order to carry on the sport," Miss Badsworth remarked, evidently following the train of her thoughts. "I always imagined when the season came round one only had to order out the hounds as one orders a carriage; however, Lavvy, I know better now. I really think I am becoming a horsewoman. Who would imagine that you and I frequently use four horses a day between us? I must say, child, your plan of personally settling the poultry claims seems satisfactory."

The fact was that both Miss Badsworth and her niece had made themselves very popular by this personal settlement, and though no doubt they were frequently imposed upon, on the other hand a great many claims were not substantiated under investigation. "Are you satisfied?" was the invariable question when payment had been made, with the result that the parties concerned usually affirmed that they were; if not the matter was gone into again.

Lavvy had learnt the geography of most of the coverts of any size, and had verified the existence of the reported litters of cubs.

"I fancy, auntie," she now said, "if people undertook chimney-sweeping they would find a considerable difference between doing the work and ordering in the sweep. You see both agriculture and sporting matters (at least as regards hounds) are worked with a view to the future, and it appears to me there is a constant endeavour to provide against contingencies; it is certainly hard work, but I daresay in our ignorance we often go a long way round."

"I suppose so, dear, but somehow or other we have as yet contrived to get there, and I really begin to find it interesting. If it wasn't for the uncertainty of the ultimate result I could go on quite contentedly; but suppose our work all goes for nothing!"

Miss Lavvy regarded her aunt with the twinkle which made her eyes so characteristic.

"Hasn't it ever happened to you before, auntie?" she asked.

Miss Badsworth playfully threatened her niece with her riding-whip; then she laughed.

"Three or four months ago I would not have confessed it, Lavvy, but I do now—often. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that Lady Flora's methods of dealing with dependants and human beings in general are very practical. To hear her talk who would believe the amount of real good she does?"

"She has been at it all her life, and those quick eyes of hers must have seen a great deal," Lavvy said. "Then, again, she is afraid of nobody."

The reading-room which Miss Badsworth had established for the villagers and retainers had been both a boon and a success, and a source of much congratulation from the rector. With some feelings of pride she had mentioned it to Lady Flora Parkfield.

"My dear, I've had one for years," the old lady had replied, "with my name and 'Licensed to sell beer on the premises' over the door. I take care the beer is good, and we rarely see a drunken man in the village."

It was with this incident in her mind that Miss Badsworth made the above remark to her niece.

Charles Badsworth made one or two visits to Cranston; they were usually connected with the purchase of horses, but invariably included an inspection of the kennels. On these occasions Joe Summers, reticent though he was, unbent on the subject of Miss Lavvy.

"If she's only as good with them out as she is in the kennel we sha'n't do amiss," he had said. "It's a hard job for a woman, but it's the wet I'm afraid'll beat her, please God we have any."

"It sometimes rains in Cornwall, Summers," Mr. Badsworth had rejoined dryly.

The late summer slipped by; country houses filled; garden parties came and went; house parties were arranged for the coming partridge shooting.

With the exception of one or two thunder-showers the

weather was fine and dry: by good luck the thunderstorms came in time to save the roots, and yet the harvest was early.

Miss Badsworth in fact had a favourable time for her first experience of farming. but her niece had more difficulty in carrying out Joe Summers' methods of getting hounds in condition. All sorts of rumours prevailed in the surrounding neighbourhood. Some people declared on the best authority that Miss Badsworth had adopted a remarkable hermaphrodite costume, and at the same time was very much averse to the ordinary contents of male garments. It did not take long to expand or modify rumours of the kind according to the taste of receiver or transmitter. Then to those who called and had the good fortune to find Miss Badsworth at home there accrued much disappointment, for nothing could be farther from the preconceived ideas than Miss Badsworth herself clad in fashionable tailor-made garments, or, perchance, a riding habit of the newest pattern. Such callers came from a distance; those in the immediate neighbourhood had naturally either seen Miss Badsworth or made her acquaintance on the occasion of her visits to Cranston in her brother's time.

"The girl would be rather nice-looking if it wasn't for that ridiculously short hair," was a frequent comment on Lavvy as the callers settled themselves upon the cushions of their landaus and returned homewards under the influence of a sense of injury.

Only early risers—and they consisted principally of labourers or their employers—had as yet seen the slim figure in the stained red coat and bowler hat in the midst of the hounds at exercise until September had just come in; then it was that Major Creswell was astonished as he returned to his breakfast from a visit to his little dairy farm, where the vet. had just expressed doubts as to the recovery of a favourite cow. The sound of horses trotting on the road arrested his attention, and bobbing heads and just a flash of scarlet proclaimed hounds at exercise. The Major

paused at the half-opened gate through which he was about to pass, as any man worthy of the name would do, and watched the three figures on horseback and the little forest of white sterns which quivered like a reed bed over the patches of white and black and tan which seemed to fill the narrow lane around the central horse. Ned Barlow in front he knew well, but who the deuce was the boy—he could scarcely be more than a boy—who was in command? The Major noted a horseman in the easy but firm seat in the saddle.

"Then Miss Badsworth is going to have a huntsman after all," he muttered.

Lavvy recognised the figure of the fussy little man. She had long since got used to herself in her novel garb; but as yet, being thoroughly human, she dreaded the remarks which she felt sure would be made, and the sneers which would fall to her lot in the presence of others, especially of her own sex.

There was nothing for it but to brave it out and act on Lady Flora's words: "Take deuced good care she wasn't interfered with". Fortunately she possessed more than her share of pluck, and so determined to accept the inevitable, salute the Major (it never occurred to her that he might fail to recognise her) and pass on. But the Fates ordered differently.

The "poof, poof" of a motor horn sounded close at hand, and in front there was a sharp corner to the lane. More than once Lavvy had suffered some anxiety for her hounds at the reckless hands of young Sorter and others.

"Hold hard, Ned!" she exclaimed. "Put your horse across the road! Will you kindly open the gate, sir? Good morning," she added as coolly as she could to the Major with an upward sweep of her whip in token of salutation which quite deceived the old gentleman with regard to her sex.

The car was brought to a stand as near to Ned's horse as that animal would permit; but he managed to bar the way until the last of the pack had passed through the gate.

"You can't want all the road!" the driver exclaimed.

"Pretty nearly, sir, in this narrow lane; we've twenty-eight couple and a half out."

"You might trust to my driving."

"Yes, sir," Ned replied with his accustomed civility, but with the shadow of a smile. "But we don't like risking nothing with hounds."

Sorter drove on with a nod to the Major, not quite certain in his mind what Ned had meant.

"Beastly things those motors," the Major growled. "You can cross these fields if you like," he added to Lavvy. "There's a gate over yonder which opens on the lane again."

Lavvy thanked him and he bundled along wrapped in admiration of the roan pony (for he was little more) which the girl bestrode.

"You'll begin hunting soon, I suppose," he puffed, for the pony was a fast walker.

"I think Miss Badsworth will begin as soon as ever we get some rain," Lavvy replied. She felt relieved; evidently the Major didn't recognise her.

"Plenty of foxes, I suppose?"

"A very good show, I hear."

"Many young hounds?"

"Only four couples. Miss Badsworth will probably work with a small pack."

Lavvy pulled up her pony and pointed out the youngsters to the Major, who had some difficulty in finding fault; then she thanked him again, wished him good morning, passed into the lane and jogged homewards.

"Just seen the hounds," the Major said to his wife as he helped himself to poached eggs and bacon and took his seat. "They look well; a pity they should be messed about by womenfolk, they'll be as wild and riotous as the devil. Can't quite make it out; there was a decent gentlemanly young chap with them; he seemed to know more than I should have expected. Don't know who he can be; nice

light-weight; smart roan pony too. Perhaps Miss Badsworth is going to have a huntsman after all, but she'll forfeit the place if she does. Don't understand it."

Mrs. Creswell, who was evidently interested in a letter, glanced up with a suspicious look at her spouse as he punctuated his remarks with rapid mouthfuls, after the manner of fussy people. She herself was a placid person, which together with firmness of purpose (most of the money belonged to her) probably accounted for the fact that the Major was second in command at home. A glance showed her that her husband, who prided himself on his perspicacity, had as usual made a mistake.

"*I* saw the hounds go by on the road," she said. "I didn't see the young man, George, but I saw Miss Badsworth's niece."

"God bless my soul! What?"

The Major put down his knife and fork and endeavoured to eradicate with his napkin some poached egg which had tried to assimilate itself with his moustache; there was an amount of ferocity in the action which proved his astonishment.

"Miss who? A girl? That? Confound it, I'm not a fool, Margaret."

"Only mistaken, dear, that's all. You know you sometimes are."

"Well, I'm——"

"Hush! You are not on parade, George."

"And this is what we've come to, is it? Will Miss Badsworth herself turn out like that?"

"I cannot tell you," his wife replied, preparing to resume the perusal of her letter; "according to report Miss Badsworth holds curious views on the subject of dress."

The Major grunted and ejaculated over reminiscences of the well-set-up figure on the roan pony. It was not so much the costume which affected his mental equilibrium as the fact that he had been taken in. After consideration, and a few minutes' silence, he exclaimed:—

"There was nothing to lead one to suppose she was a girl, she seemed as much at home in the saddle as any man. Now I come to think of it, her voice——"

"Did you ever see a man with a figure like that?" his wife asked as she pushed back her chair.

The Major gave it to be understood that he was lost eternally.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When the patter of raindrops gave the first promise that the surface of the earth was about to lose its cast-iron qualities, Miss Lavinia Badsworth, the younger, experienced the unpleasant sensation that she was about to be weighed in the balance. For some months she had been conscious that the day would come if she lived, and she had worked hard with that end in view; but now that the inevitable was within measurable distance, misgivings stalked in and sat down as if they had come to stay. Twelve hours later, with the rain still falling, the cards went forth to tell those concerned that two days hence the hounds would meet at Clinkern Wood at six A.M. When she had addressed the last, Lavvy rested her elbows on her late uncle's desk, and her chin upon her hands.

"You'll have plenty of room in Clinkern Wood," Joe Summers had said, "and I'll ride up on the cob and lend you a hand if I can."

There was consolation in this, and also in the belief that the early hour would make the number of spectators small.

Then came letters which took away a free hand in some parts of the country and rendered necessary the study of the hunting map. Several shootists intimated their wish that hounds should not touch their coverts until they had been shot. There had been in Hugo Badsworth's time some few who had issued this ultimatum, but there had always been a feeling approaching reverence for the late master which had held in check those who were inclined to eat their cake and have it too; those who, whilst they were ready to participate in the sport provided by other people, were of

opinion (based on the report of keepers who having sold their masters' birds accounted for shortage by the hounds coming early) that incalculable damage was done by routing about the cubs. Some of these took heart of grace now that Hugo was gone and his sister reigned in his stead. Of such was Mr. Silas Tucker (the old horror, as Lavvy called him), who, dissatisfied with the fact that his wife's prize poultry had fallen victims to a two-legged thief (which an inspection clearly proved), at once forbade the presence of hounds in his coverts until after the middle of November.

Mr. Silas Tucker was one of those people who, having made a fortune in cement, sought late in life to become a country magnate; money could do most things, it could amongst them provide any amount of birds to be shot at, but all the same it could not purchase the love of sport in its true sense, that innate sportsmanship which is beyond the reach of coin of the realm.

Mrs. Tucker had her trials and difficulties. Having sat herself down on the chess-board of Society as a queen, she found herself held in check by the Duchess (the *dear* Duchess, she called her) of Glencoe, and her daughter, Lady Susan Blueberry, who made use of her on occasion but at the same time held her at arm's-length.

The Duchess had married, secondly, Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis, and there were times when in private, and bitterness of spirit, Mrs. Tucker remarked to her two rather plain daughters that the names coupled together "sounded most improper". The Duchess and Lady Susan hunted (Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis only came out on occasion), consequently it was deemed necessary that the Misses Tucker should "'unt" (as Silas put it) also. He gazed at the ample proportions of his wife, and then considered his own few equestrian attainments, so the family honour in the field had to be upheld by his son, Edwin (at Cambridge, in vain trying to take a degree by means of spending money), and his daughters, Lucy and Prudence.

Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis wrote to Miss Badsworth to say

his coverts were unavailable until after his first shooting party.

It was fortunate that these evil communications in high places took little root generally; it was also fortunate that the kennels were placed in a fairly central spot and the forbidden ground near the outside, but it was equally unfortunate that what Lady Flora Parkfield said to Jack Morgan on the subject went no farther.

It may here be noted that the Duchess, whose jointure would die with her, was of opinion that were it not for the rest of the Tucker impedimenta, the son would have plenty of money and might be licked into shape for Lady Susan; whilst the young lady herself thought Mr. John Morgan of Newnton a far preferable person. But this is rather beyond the subject.

Lavvy consulted the map, noted the coverts in proximity to the forbidden land, and wondered what would happen if hounds slipped away in the direction of Silas Tucker's coverts at Berryhead, the immediate neighbourhood of which partook of the nature of a wire entanglement.

One good came out of evil, the spirit of antagonism arose in Miss Lavvy; she cast aside her anxieties and resolved to do or die.

A humble but staunch ally there was who had sworn fealty to Miss Badsworth and her niece, an individual belonging to that race of intelligent and remarkable persons to be found amongst the retinue of most hunts, entitled "runners," or "the man with the terriers". Such an one was Alf Diccox, a spare, wiry man of forty, with a weather-beaten countenance, keen eyes and accurately designed mutton-chop whiskers closely cut.

Nobody knew his history, or rather the history of his early years; he might have been a second horseman, or even a hunt servant, but for fifteen years past he had dwelt on the outskirts of Cranston village, and was at the present moment a walking encyclopædia of the Cranston country and all that dwelt therein. The keepers said he was a poacher, but not

one of them had a tittle of evidence to bring against him beyond the fact that he kept ferrets and employed his spare time as a rat-catcher of some note. That he knew every litter of foxes within the boundaries of the hunt, and occasionally what had become of them, did not add to his popularity amongst his velveteen-clad brethren, but withal he was a man of few words: "They *was* there, but they bein't now," being the utmost to which he would commit himself. In the summer his outfit was varied, though breeches and leggings invariably formed a part; in the hunting season he donned a stained red coat and rusty velvet hunting-cap.

Hugo Badsworth gave Alf's character the benefit of the doubt and himself a cottage rent free, and employed him in various ways. He was a man to whom fatigue was unknown, whose knowledge of country was unlimited, and whose instinct (for such it must have been) rarely led him astray when once a fox had left covert.

Miss Badsworth had busied herself, amongst other things, in getting an invalid daughter of his into a convalescent home, and Lavvy had selected another who was sound and able-bodied to be, what she called, her valet. Hence the above-mentioned oath of fealty; though it must be acknowledged that intense admiration for "the Reformer" and much learned conversation with Miss Lavvy on the point had set the seal on the compact.

. . . . . .

It was in the grey dawn of a September morning that Diccox first inspected the weather before loosing a couple of broken-haired terriers.

"A wet jacket more than likely before we gets back," he said, "but maybe 'twill be only off the bushes, they won't have trimmed out the rides yet." Then, after leaving things thus in the hands of Providence, he fed his fowls, whistled his terriers, and swinging a lead and couples in his hand, set forth for Clinkern Wood, three miles off. There were glistening drops upon the sprays in the hedges and the ripened grass by the roadside, the leaves of the swedes held

translucent globes of moisture in their recesses—boding wet legs for the partridge shooters by-and-by; more than one covey of those birds were in places running on the roads in vain seeking a dusting place, or using the highway as the best route to a favourite stubble; here and there a laggard with trailing wing called lustily to his more able-bodied brethren in front.

"Retrievers ain't what they was; them show benches is the ruin of them and terriers," Diccox remarked; he was used to talk to himself more freely than to others.

A sweet fresh smell of soaked earth pervaded everything, and increased as the sun broke through a cloud-bank on the eastern horizon. The milkers were busy at the farms, and carters clattered methodically about as those whose business needs no hurry.

The shrill cry of a jay broke the stillness at Clinkern Wood when eventually Alf coupled his terriers and passed along the lower side.

"Easier to come down than go up by-and-by," he thought, and then proceeded upwards to a post of vantage in the wood itself from whence a view of the proceedings could be obtained. Seated on a stump he produced a hunch of bread and cheese from his pocket and whiled away the time with its consumption, watched by the ubiquitous robin with its bead-like eye from a branch hard by. There was no wind to stir the hazel leaves browned on their edges by the summer heat, and nothing broke the stillness but the occasional "shute, shute, shute" of a blackbird, who, finding himself suddenly face to face with a human being, made a quick turn in his flight, and speedy exit.

Before long a horse blew out his nose somewhere down below, and the sound seemed close at hand though a quarter of a mile away.

A young farmer on a young horse, and someone's servant on another, were coming up a bridle road; another horseman was visible farther on. Then came the sound of horses trotting on the road, and Alf could soon see red coats, a lady

in a dark habit, and one or two men clad in tweeds. He closed his knife and rose to his feet.

A brief pause was made in the field below, there evidently was a consultation of some sort, then the first whip rode off to the right and the second whip to the left, whilst the rest of the party rode slowly towards the covert until they were hidden from view by the foliage of the trees.

"Yoi over in! Heu try!" travelled up to Diccox with a clear, bell-like sound. The runner stood listening with his head slightly on one side. Then he nodded in the direction of the terriers, who sat with cocked ears, and muttered, "I should never have thought it".

The occasional crack of a whip, or Miss Lavvy's voice, was the only indication of the direction taken. Some minutes of silence passed, then a hound spoke; the silence which followed was intensified until it was again broken by the hound; speedily a duet became a trio, and then Miss Lavvy's cheer seemed to invoke a chorus, "Hew, for'rard, for'rard!"

Along the top of the wood they came chirping merrily, the sound rising and falling with the undulating surface of the ground. More than once Diccox thought they had turned back, till the squelching of a horse's hoofs in the wet ride proved that that was not the case.

Alf stood close to the butt of a tree like a statue, with a hand extended behind his back towards the terriers, and his eyes fixed upon the ride.

In due course a fine cub appeared, stopped to listen and then crossed over. The two terriers dashed to the limit of their lead and fell over on their backs, drawing a rebuke from their owner.

Diccox's first impulse was to holloa; it takes a man of knowledge and discretion to hold his tongue on such an occasion; but the runner possessed both qualities. Hounds were running well, the scent was good. The sound of a horse with a creaking saddle made Diccox look behind him. Captain Majendie was bustling up.

"Hold hard, sir!" Alf exclaimed, holding up a hand.

"Have you seen him? Which way did he go? Why don't you holloa?" the Captain asked excitedly.

Diccox made no reply. The hounds were running towards him as fast as the underwood would permit, and close to them in the ride was Miss Lavvy. The chorus suddenly ceased, and the girl pulled up her horse. Diccox made a motion with his thumb across the ride, and looked with mingled wonder and admiration at the slim figure before him. Lavvy was already splashed with mud, and her white buckskin breeches showed plainly how full of water the overhanging bushes had been.

"Hey! Tally-ho over!" she cried, turning the Banker to one side; as the leading hounds hit the line, she blew her horn, cheered them forward, and disappeared in the direction from whence she had come.

"By Jove, she's quick," Captain Majendie exclaimed as he followed in her wake; "but it will be a different thing when they get outside later on."

Diccox made no comment but moved a little farther down the ride. When he stopped to listen hounds had divided, and were running in three lots. Had he known the first lines of his Cæsar he would not have been surprised that such a thing should be possible.

"Let 'em bustle them, ma'am," Joe Summers advised, as Lavvy pulled up beside him, sorely puzzled as to what to do. "Wait a bit and then look for the best chance of getting them more together; there's a fine show of foxes. I saw four of our youngsters at work as they came by."

"Five," Lavvy replied, and she mentioned five names. Joe Summers smiled.

"That's right, ma'am, there were five," and as the girl turned her horse the old man nodded approvingly at her back.

For nearly an hour Lavvy had to possess her soul in patience, traversing the length and breadth of the wood several times before any opportunity offered of carrying out Joe's instructions.

Sometimes she was with one lot, sometimes with another. Fortune favoured her at length ; there was a holloa at the lower corner, and the two divisions in which hounds were now running appeared to be converging.

Hot, wet and tired, she slithered down a narrow rack, fending off the overhanging branches with her arm, and reached the lower ride in time to see Captain Majendie galloping along the meadow outside the wood.

Somewhere close by Miss Badsworth's voice exclaimed with determination :—

" Hold hard, please, and don't get in the way ! "

If she had hit the Captain over the head with her crop she could not have hurt his dignity more.

Lavvy caught a glimpse of her aunt and a horseman beside her in a tweed coat, from which she drew her own conclusions. For a second or two laughter prevented her blowing her horn, but she accomplished the feat right well at last, the pack united, and a hundred yards farther on drove a beaten cub through the fence to meet his end just outside the covert.

" Whoo ! whoop ! " the girl cried in a style which went up to Joe Summers in the ride above, at the same time slipping from the Banker's back and leaving him to catch his wind as best he could.

" Whoo ! whoop ! Mind your horses, please," as various riders drew near in anxiety to see the girl break up her first fox in the Cranston country. They were disappointed.

" Leave them alone, Ned," as the first whip prepared to make a dive for the tattered carcase. " Hew ! Worry, worry, worry ! " and then she blew her horn again.

" How many short, Ned ? " she asked presently.

" Two couple and a half, ma'am ; there are some hounds running back at the top of the wood ; I expect Bill is with 'em."

Lavvy signed to her second horseman, and Ned secured the mask after a slight difference of opinion with Ravager. As Lavvy put her foot in the stirrup, Captain Majendie,

who had left his horse and approached the scene of action, asked :—

"Is that the way to break up a fox, Miss Badsworth?"

There was a sneer in the tone of his voice which set Lavvy's back up.

"Sometimes when puppies are out for the first time. You had better ask Joseph Summers."

Then without taking further notice of the Captain she whistled the hounds and trotted away to reinforce the contingent running above.

The joining of forces made matters hot for the pursued, but more than once the foiled ground gave him a chance.

Alf Diccox, knowing well that Charlbury Spinney was only a few fields away, and that there was every chance of a fox endeavouring to evade his enemies in that direction, kept a sharp lookout.

"Ah! I thought so," he said at length confidingly to his terriers. "Yonder he goes, but he's had pretty near enough of it."

When the fox had disappeared in the first hedge, Alf sent up a holloa which had in it the true professional ring, and conveyed to all concerned that it was a case of "Gone away!"

"Hark, holloa, hark! For'rard, for'rard, away!" The twang of a horn and the sharp ringing of a whistle produced a bustle all around.

Captain Majendie galloped round a corner of the wood just as the leading hounds took up the line. Now was the chance for a gallop all to himself up to the adjoining spinney, he thought. But it was not to be; the despised girl was close at hand; a horse's head bored through the fence, and the next moment the horse himself landed with Lavvy in the field, whilst hounds poured out close beside her, and Ned Barlow, pausing for a moment to run his eye over them, quickly followed in her wake. Out here in the open, Lavvy, blowing her horn with her head bent down, felt more in her element than she had done in the recesses of Clinkern

Wood; notwithstanding the blindness of the country a sense of intense exhilaration swept over her as she glanced back and caught sight of the three couples which made up the full complement straining to get up to the body of the pack. She slipped her horn into its case, and mechanically looked for the weakest place in the fence before her.

Except from the huntsman's point of view there was no need for hurry; in fact, outside the covert, the scent, though holding, was not so good as it had been within. People knew that the chances were in favour of a short journey, so they progressed more or less at leisure. There was pace enough to make Lavvy aware that a little later on she would have to go her best in order to keep her place with her hounds.

Miss Badsworth, with Jack Morgan as guide, cantered leisurely across towards the spinney by a cart track, and pulled up near a little bridge which crossed a gully worn by a small stream in the course of centuries.

Hounds away on the right were at fault; in their eagerness they had crossed the gully and were swinging themselves in the field beyond.

Perhaps it was Alf Diccox's holloa, or fatigue, or half-heartedness which stirred the instinct of that fox to efforts for concealment; he turned short down the gully.

"For goodness sake, do hold hard and give them room!" Lavvy exclaimed to Captain Majendie.

"Hold them on! Hold them on! He is sure to have gone to the covert," the Captain said excitedly, in a tone almost of command.

Lavvy closed her teeth hard as if to keep back the words she longed to use.

"Never touch them if you can help it," Joe Summers had counselled, and there was a keen eagerness about the hounds which assured her the moment for interference had not arrived.

"That's an irrepressible chap over yonder, I'm afraid," Jack Morgan, keenly watching the proceedings, remarked to

Miss Badsworth. "He's trying to direct the little lady now; he'll have to be talked to pretty straight."

There was a rustle and clatter of gravel beneath the bridge, and Jack silently held aloft his hat. Lavvy acknowledged the signal with her hand, but waited a moment until hounds swung back to the gully and took up the line with a chorus which stirred its depths.

There was no refuge there. Captain Majendie's forecast proved wrong, for by several twists and turns, and by a circular route, the direction of the hunt was changed towards Clinkern Wood once more.

Joe Summers from the rising ground watched every incident of the chase as narrowly as the Iron Duke surveyed the progress of his troops at Waterloo. Every now and then he grunted, as Lavvy, always with her hounds, patiently allowed them to work out the line unaided.

Presently a cheer came from the little figure in the stained red coat as hounds caught a view of their sinking quarry, and the roan was called on to extend himself to some purpose.

At a fence not a quarter of a mile from the wood there fell a silence broken by the occasional baying of a hound.

"He's got in, Alf," Summers said.

"There ain't nothing there; they'll scratch him out theirselves," Diccox replied. "But p'raps I'd better slip down in case. It's only a bit of a rabbit spout."

It was as he said, and before he got there the end had come.

As Lavvy rode home in the middle of the pack, with her aunt on one side and Jack Morgan on the other, tired and stiff though she was, she felt a sense of satisfaction that the ice had been broken, and through things turning out in her favour she had been less inefficient than she had anticipated.

"Certainly old Beckford was right when he noted the importance of a steady pack of hounds," Jack remarked. He would dearly have liked to praise the huntsman in plain words, but somehow he felt compelled to use a circuitous method.

"I'm glad all the work has not gone for nothing," the girl replied.

"I'm not so sure as I was about the result of man's work in woman's hands," Miss Badsworth remarked. "You are very wonderful, Lavvy."

"Wait a bit, auntie; one cannot always be in luck's way," Lavvy replied.

"I think it depends on who the woman is," Jack observed with conviction in his voice.

"Perhaps having had to be a son as well as a daughter makes a difference," Lavvy laughed. And then they had to pass through a bridle-gate in single file.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

As Jack Morgan wended his way to Newnton with the reins on his horse's neck he pondered many things with which Miss Lavinia Badsworth, the younger, was concerned. As a sportsman he could not help a feeling of pride at the success of his little ally. He knew that there were very few men who, placed in the same position, would have kept their heads and carried out what were no doubt Joe Summers' instructions as the girl had done. There had been no sign of swagger or self-consciousness about her; she had concentrated herself upon what she had to do, and had done it; but all the same Jack would have welcomed what he called "a bust up of the whole show," if only it would have liberated Lavvy from her share of responsibility. "She'll meet with some accident or get some bad tumbles for a certainty, though there is more judgment than recklessness in the way she goes," he thought.

Just then Captain Majendie rode up alongside him.

"Not a bad morning for the first," he said.

"No, never saw a better," Jack replied.

"A good bit of luck, you know."

"Was there? Where or when?"

"Well, having a scent, you know."

"I suppose that does help. Anything else?"

"That holloa, for instance, between Clinkern and the spinney; you might have bet your hat the fox had gone on."

"I didn't hear one, and if there was one, Miss Badsworth took no notice of it."

Majendie had too high an opinion of himself to observe that Jack's remarks had an aggressive tone in them.

"What I saw," Jack went on, "was a wonderfully steady pack of hounds as keen as mustard, and a huntsman or huntswoman who kept her head, and knew what to do, which would have surprised me if I hadn't seen something like it before."

"Now you mention it, the hounds were steady, there was very little riot, but I fancy the young lady will potter a bit when it comes to the open."

"You seem observant; did you happen to notice how hounds got to their huntsman, and how they came away from the covert with her, or were you too busy trying to ride them off the line?"

"Ride them off the line? What do you mean?"

"If there had been a man handling the horn you wouldn't have had to ask or dared to do it; you mobbed the lady whenever you could, just because she couldn't or wouldn't swear at you. I just mention it, for Miss Badsworth, the master, is as likely as not to send the hounds home under such circumstances, even if the King himself were out."

"My dear fellow, I only wanted to be handy in case help or advice was wanted," Majendie replied apologetically.

"Well, take *my* advice. Ned and Bill Sheppard can give what help is wanted, and as for your advice you may spare yourself the trouble. I have seen Miss Badsworth handle her fox after forty minutes in the damndest country man or woman ever rode over."

"The deuce you have? I thought she was a beginner. Did she let them worry him without taking him away so as to break him up properly?"

"No," Jack replied, with the memory of the scene on the Cornish moor before his mind's eye, "she didn't; but then there were no puppies joining in. Perhaps it doesn't occur to you would-bes that if puppies get chided and knocked about in the scrimmage the timid ones think they've done wrong."

"Would-bes! What do you mean?"

"Would-be masters or huntsmen!" Jack opened the gate at Newnton as he replied.

"Ah! I shall be that one of these first days!" Majendie called after him.

"A poor day when you are. Good morning," Jack called back.

"Was there ever such an unsnubable man before?" Jack muttered as he trotted towards the stables; though what Majendie had said should have fitted in with the thoughts which had filled his mind before the Captain arrived: but it didn't. "Damn him," he said heartily, and it may be observed with truth that he had hardly recovered his usual good temper by the time he joined Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis' party bent on partridge driving.

Neither Mr. Silas Tucker nor his son could hit a driven partridge any more than they could fly with the coveys themselves, but an invitation to shoot Mr. Tucker's coverts was a thing to be desired, consequently not only were they asked on this occasion, but Mrs. Tucker and her daughters were invited to join the Duchess and Lady Susan at the luncheon rendezvous in the afternoon. Walking up partridges, even in early September, had long since been voted slow work, and dogs were things of the past. In proportion to the reduction in the necessary exercise the sumptuousness of the midday meal had increased. There was quite a spread at Kington Farm, over which the Duchess presided. She was a little woman, who had acquired an aristocratic bearing (as she thought) by simply holding her head high and living up to the position to which the late Duke had raised her; in fact she was a contrast to some of those who, being born to the purple, live *down* to the front row of the chorus. The reader can decide which he or she (if ever they get so far as this) likes best. The Duchess was a stickler for the precedence of her position, which was well, for it reminded others that she had a right to it.

Jack Morgan lay low with regard to any mention of the hounds. There was a certain young lady whose doings he wouldn't have had canvassed for the world. He talked guns and evinced an intense concern for a miniature rifle club in

which her Grace and Lady Susan took an interest; they neither of them could shoot to any purpose, having still the rooted feminine objection to a report, however modified; but naturally the Duchess was a leader in the social circle and was aware of the fact.

There was a tradition, and it may have been founded on fact, that at one time the Duchess "went very well"; if she had lost her nerve a bit now she did not acknowledge it, and few could have been found who would endanger their bread and butter by pointing out the fact to her.

That Miss Badsworth was a leader in a different line, and by force of circumstances had suddenly appeared as a constellation in the circuit which the Duchess claimed as her own, was perhaps sufficient cause for jealousy. When her Grace had called at Cranston, like many others, she had found a good-looking, quiet and unobtrusive lady, who never once gave herself away, but left the impression, even on the unalgebraic mind, that she was an unknown quantity.

"I couldn't make head or tail of her, my dear," she had said to her daughter, who, having a cold in her head, had not accompanied her, "and she was dressed like anybody else, only, I must say, in perfect taste. I asked her to join our rifle club, but she declined, saying it was not much in her line, and yet she is going to try and hunt hounds!"

That an avoided topic should come to the surface was only a matter of course; it always does.

"I thought I heard hounds running in the distance this morning when I was tinkering up the motor. Was any one out? Were you, Morgan?" Toby Sorter asked in a pause of conversation.

"Yes, I went," Jack replied, aware that now he was in for some cross-examination, to say nothing of examination in chief. "There were plenty of foxes and quite a nice scent; they killed a brace of cubs and got outside for nearly twenty minutes with one."

"And who really did hunt the hounds?" the Duchess asked. "There have been so many stories about; people say

that the niece has been exercising the hounds (we've only just got back from Scotland). Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis' agent met the hounds one morning and thought there were three men with them till he heard afterwards that one was Miss Badsworth's niece."

"It shows that there was nothing very odd about it," Jack said, beating about in his mind for some means of changing the conversation and avoiding a direct answer.

"Boots and things and riding like a man not odd, Mr. Morgan!" Mrs. Tucker exclaimed. "Really, what will people do next?"

"I really can't imagine," Jack said, helping himself to raised pie. "Lots of things happen to-day which would have astonished our grandmothers, and still more things occurred in their day which would have astonished us. They called a spade a spade and weren't shocked; we use it and pretend to be horrified at the mere name of it. Don't you think there is a great deal of humbug about, Mrs. Tucker?"

"It entirely depends how you have been brought up," Mrs. Tucker replied with a British matron air.

"You are right, no doubt," said Jack.

"I 'ardly think a woman 'as the right to make a mountebank of 'erself," Mr. Tucker remarked with his mouth full; he always enjoyed feeding.

"Depends what you call a mountebank; prejudice has a deal to say in the matter, don't you think? The first time I saw a lady running after her horse with her safety skirt careering away on the crutch of her saddle I thought it odd. I don't now; it seemed better than having your brains dashed out against the floor." Jack laughed. "As for the *right* it would hardly be well to question it in these days."

"I wonder Miss Badsworth at her age taking to such a dress and riding in such a way," the Duchess said, "but, of course, one sees from reports that she has leanings in that direction."

"Is she as old as good Queen Bess?" asked Jack. "I

think, Duchess, if she has fairplay Miss Badsworth will make a good master."

The memory of Hugo Badsworth had to bear the comments of the next quarter of an hour. Both Mr. Collingbourne-Ducis and Mr. Silas Tucker salved their consciences with regard to their coverts by agreeing that hounds were bad enough as a general rule, but with an inexperienced woman to handle them they would hang about all day and do incalculable mischief.

"But you haven't answered my question, Mr. Morgan, as to who hunted the hounds." The Duchess suddenly remembered that her curiosity had not been gratified.

"Miss Lavinia Badsworth, of course, she's bound to," Jack replied.

"Well, I really can't fancy it, from what I saw of her. Can she ride?" The Duchess had fallen into Jack's trap.

"I fancy she can, but you should come out and see for yourself."

"I never like hunting in the middle of the night. Hunting suits me better when foxes have learnt to run." The Duchess spoke with the air of one used to take a good place and keep it.

"We'd better be getting to work," her spouse said, lighting his cigar. "Come along."

. . . . . .

"Well, how did you get on?" Victor Bickersdyke asked, when Captain Majendie dropped in to see him. Victor was making a sketch of the view from the window, in which the upper branches of two over-ripe elm trees had changed to a yellow autumnal tint long before the lower foliage had shown a sign of parting with its summer verdure.

"Hum!" Majendie ejaculated doubtfully. "It's not going to be as easy as I thought; the girl is wonderfully smart for a girl, and is rather difficult to get hold of."

Victor looked up. "You mean Miss Lavinia?" he asked in a stand-off tone.

"Of course," Majendie replied. "I only meant it's diffi-

cult to get her to take advice, she has got an opinion of her own and likes having her own way."

"It's Lavvy all over, but she'll alter all that by-and-by. I suppose my aunt didn't take any part in the hunting?"

"No; but she was out and seemed inclined to look after things. That chap Morgan seems to have got her ear."

"Ah, damn him, he'll have to clear out pretty soon; we shall have to wait till November, and the first day on which my aunt fails to hunt the hounds I shall come down on the lot with an injunction or something."

"I wish you would have another try to get me a bit nearer the work, Bickersdyke. It will be rather hard to have it suddenly thrown on my hands."

"You'll have to put up with that. I've had one snub, and I'm not taking any more just now. I shall lie low."

Majendie muttered something about a fool and his folly, but Victor took no notice.

. . . . . .

It was not all gold that glittered. Lavvy worked hard; five days a fortnight enabled her to visit a good many coverts and stir up their inhabitants. There were the good days and bad days, days with scent and days with none, windy days and wet days. So far she was lucky, her horses turned out well, and as yet she had only two falls to her credit, though Ned Barlow had been laid by for a week. Gradually the time of meeting approached a reasonable hour, and as October came in, ten o'clock became the time named on the card.

Miss Badsworth found her place in the field anything but a sinecure. Curiosity began to bring people out from all directions. Even under Jack Morgan's pilotage the master frequently failed to be up at the critical moment, and more than once Miss Lavvy lost her fox as much by the over-riding of hounds as by error of judgment on her part.

It must not be supposed that there was any deliberate intention of annoying the lady huntsman, but partly because of the novelty there was a desire to observe the girl closely,

and partly owing to the absence of male authority people forgot to use any little judgment they possessed when their blood was up.

Charles Badsworth paid a visit to Cranston in the early October days.

"You are thin, little girl," he said when first he saw his daughter. "Now, tell me, is this hard work doing you any harm, because if so we will jack the whole thing up. All the money in the world couldn't make up for you, Lavvy."

"You dear old thing, I knew you would say that. I assure you I never felt better in my life. I have lost nearly a stone in weight, but I'm getting into hard condition. It takes a long day to tire me out now, and auntie lets me off dinner parties and functions of that sort. I'm just wanting you to come out once or twice, dad; I rarely can get room when I want it. I tried not letting them know when I got away, but it was a mistake; they think I'm always going to do it."

"Of course they do, child. I must speak to your aunt about it."

Rattling Hoxton Wood was a necessity before the season proper commenced, but owing to the proximity of Mr. Tucker's coverts at Berryhead, the fixture was postponed as long as possible. It was a windy day when hounds went to draw the covert, and as Hoxton Wood clothed two sides of a low hill it was a difficult place in which either to see or hear what was going on.

All precautions were taken to guard the Berryhead side; there were foxes on foot, for it was a favourite stronghold, but the scent was poor in the covert itself. Lavvy worked hard and so did the wind, which roared in the trees and successfully rendered other sounds indistinct or inaudible. That hounds had divided Lavvy knew, but she stuck to the main body and never heard Bill Sheppard's holloa away on the opposite side of the wood. Six couples of hounds came away, taking up the line at a pace which showed that outside the wood scent was better. Bill holloaed again, listened, could hear nothing of the huntsman, and hesitated; he

knew well enough that it was his duty to stop this lot if the body of the pack was running elsewhere. Just at that moment Captain Majendie came out of the covert with two or three more horsemen.

"Better get on, Bill," he shouted. "I expect Miss Badsworth will be here directly; there are people coming away down below—look!"

So Bill and Captain Majendie and three or four more set to work to ride after the fast disappearing hounds. It was quite true that others wide on the left were doing the same, and for over a quarter of an hour there was one of those exhilarating spins which fills hearts with contentment. Close beside some farm buildings hounds were at fault. Bill looked back, there was no sign of Miss Lavvy or the rest of the pack.

"I'd better stop them, I think," he said dubiously.

"Nonsense, put them to me. I'll cast them round the farm-house and soon put them right," Majendie said, and he started to carry out his plan. But that was all. A fence crashed hard by, and a voice exclaimed in stentorian tones:—

"Who the devil are you, sir? Leave those hounds alone and mind your own business or go home." Then to Bill, whose conscience was smiting him: "Can't you see the body of the pack are running elsewhere? If you know your business, why the deuce don't you do it? Get them back as fast as you can."

"Lord," said the owner of the farm, who was leaning over a neighbouring gate, "it's just as though the old Squire was rose from the dead."

Charles Badsworth and Bill got back toward Hoxton Wood as fast as horses could carry them; and Bill confided later to Ned Barlow, "He never saw a man of the weight go no straighter".

Captain Majendie, both angry and crestfallen, returned by a more devious route, cherishing a hope that before long he would turn the tables.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the meantime Miss Lavvy had been patiently hunting her fox in Hoxton Wood, unaware of the proceedings outside. In the centre of the wood was an old quarry, whence tradition said the stone of which Berryhead House had been built had been dug; hard by, now carefully stopped, were the main earths.

Twice the hunted fox tried them in vain, the second time going straight up the steep side and over the top. Even after a considerable detour it was a bad scramble for horses, and by the time Lavvy and Ned got up, hounds had traversed half the covert on the other side and were running hard up wind.

Alf Diccox, the only custodian on the dangerous side now left (for the general impression had prevailed that hounds were gone in the opposite direction), viewed the fox away, and vainly endeavoured to stop the hounds. He might as well have tried to pen back Niagara. The scent had improved, they were running up wind, and all that was left for him to do was to signal the fact to the authorities, and watch the water fly up where the little river Berry, dammed up to serve Berry mill, formed a wide, deep and unjumpable leat, two fields away.

Lavvy was the first to come away, but Ned was in close attendance, and from somewhere on the other side Jack Morgan appeared.

"The bridge is to the left, ma'am," Ned shouted, and Jack cried "Quite unjumpable," so the trio made for the bridge, and the hounds went for Berryhead at their best pace.

"We must stop them somehow," Lavvy called out, and the three rode for all they were worth to cut off the pack. Within half a mile of Berryhead, just as a regular steeplechase had given a chance of getting to their heads, a long stretch of wire opposed progress, and beyond again another and another were visible. Hounds slipped through and ran over the grass at an incredible pace.

"Yonder he goes, ma'am, over the lawn in front of the house," Ned said, struggling with a new white gate.

"It's all up, now," Lavvy said.

"Knock the lock off, Ned; we may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," Jack shouted. The gate was opened; there were three more in a line but fortunately they were low; Mr. Tucker had saved a strand of wire and a bar in his gates.

The Banker, who was out that morning, was blown, but he was good at timber; he hit the third gate hard but recovered himself; Morgan's horse broke the top bar, and Ned's destroyed what remained, and the three went for the home covert with an eye on the gesticulating figure of Silas Tucker hurrying in the same direction. So close were hounds to their fox that they drove him through a corner of the wood and rolled him over within a hundred yards of the infuriated Silas.

In a few moments Lavvy was there with a fine dog-fox in her hand and Ned clearing a space, whilst Jack Morgan sat on his horse and mopped his face in the background.

Silas Tucker was forgotten; the "Whoo! whoop!" and the horn drowned the mutterings of the rising storm.

"I wonder where the other six couples are, Ned," Lavvy said, as the first whip took off the mask and brush and thrust pads into his pockets.

"Haven't seen or heard them for some time, ma'am; the wind's so rough there's no telling. Back, Warrior," as a hound nearly caught the carcase out of his hand.

Lavvy took the mangled remains and held them aloft to the accompaniment of a baying chorus.

"Whoo! whoop! Hey! Worry, worry!" she cried, and the next moment a growling, struggling mass had torn the remnants of the fox limb from limb, with the silvery notes of the horn sounding over the temporary tumult.

"We are well out of that," Lavvy said to Jack Morgan with a smile, taking a few steps towards him, thrusting her horn into the breast of her coat and wiping her hands on an exceptionally large handkerchief which she had brought out for the purpose. Her back was towards Mr. Tucker, whom she had forgotten, but Jack could see the coming outburst and promptly dismounted. In the distance scattered horsemen were coming up, who had learned from Alf Diccox the direction the chase had taken.

"What's the use of my writing to say 'ounds weren't to touch my coverts?" Mr. Tucker inquired, with intervals between the words, caused by the necessity of pumping oxygen into his lungs. "This place is mine, and what's mine is my own, and I won't 'ave it."

Lavvy turned quickly, with the smile still upon her face, and confronted the angry man whom she had altogether forgotten. Silas Tucker stood at several yards' distance by reason of a certain suspicion with which he regarded the hounds, a suspicion which was emphasised by the fact that Foreman and Senator were having a tug-of-war over a tough morsel of the fox. He took a step or two backwards as the struggle ended in favour of Foreman.

"I'm exceedingly sorry, sir," Lavvy said. "We did all we could to stop them between this and Hoxton Wood, but the mill leat at first and then the wire prevented our getting to them; they only just touched the corner of the covert yonder."

Mr. Tucker was angry, and Mr. Tucker was used to browbeat his dependants and rule his household as though he lived in feudal times. Having right on his side, and his orders having been disobeyed, and the two persons in red coats being, as he supposed, hunt servants, he turned the vials of his wrath upside down.

"I've nothing to do with that, young man," he said. "My orders were clear enough and I expect 'em to be carried out; you don't suppose I'm going to pay 'undreds for my birds and 'ave 'em driven all over the place by your confounded dogs."

Lavvy's face flushed all over—she was reminded of her costume—then for the life of her she couldn't conceal another smile as the humorous side of the picture struck her.

"Don't be angry, sir," she said. "There is no harm done; hounds weren't in the covert half a minute and there's one fox less to eat your birds as you call them."

Mr. Tucker had a suspicion that this boy, whoever he was, was laughing at him, and ridicule he couldn't stand.

"Confound you, you young jackanapes, it's no laughing matter! If you had your deserts they would be this stick. If you can't manage your blessed 'ounds, take 'em 'ome."

For one moment Lavvy wished she had belonged to the other sex, and Jack Morgan wished Silas Tucker was his own age.

"It was the wire," Lavvy said apologetically. "We had to go a long way round to get to the gates."

"I suppose I may have wire if I like. I put it up, and what's more, I paid for it."

This was perhaps an allusion to the fact that in his neighbourhood the two things did not necessarily go together.

"That doesn't make it any easier to get over on a horse, sir," Lavvy replied; her temper was getting a little ruffled.

Mr. Tucker worked himself up, and Jack Morgan thought it might be judicious to put in a word, but something he saw made him change his mind.

Like many others of his class, Mr. Tucker, finding his vocabulary limited, made use of sundry unseemly expressions which made Miss Lavvy bite her lips, turn her back on him and walk slowly towards her horse, whereupon Mr. Tucker rubbed in his remarks by means of vain repetitions. They were suddenly cut short. A blowing horse was pulled up just behind him, and a voice superior to his own told him

to hold his infernal tongue and try and find any manners he might have left about.

Mr. Tucker turned, and in a moment his air of authority left him; it might have been Hugo Badsworth himself who sat mopping his face with a silk handkerchief, and for Hugo Badsworth he had had feelings of respect when it came to a war of words.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Field-master for the time being, owing to Miss Badsworth's indisposition, and that's my daughter," pointing to Lavvy, "whom you have been treating to such choice language. You shut yourself in here with wire like a damned poll parrot in a cage, and think you are everybody. Well, you aren't. What are you going to do about it?"

Silas Tucker evaporated. "Your daughter!" he exclaimed.

Somehow the expression on Mr. Tucker's face appealed to Lavvy, he seemed so utterly knocked out of time with astonishment.

"Mr. Tucker made a mistake, dad," she said. "I don't think he is to be blamed for it. Ned, give me that brush. I'm sure you ought to have this, sir" (handing the flimsy piecè of fur which had whisked so gallantly earlier in the day), "you were nearest when we caught him."

Silas Tucker took the trophy automatically and looked the girl up and down from her velvet cap to the neat top-boots; then he glanced up at Charles Badsworth and said:—

"Your daughter! A girl! Well, I'm—blessed. Come down to the 'ouse and get some refreshment. I saw her jump those three gates."

Lavvy walked alongside the old man with the hounds around her; she knew that she would have to go through the ordeal of inspection by Mrs. Tucker and her daughters if they happened to be at home, but, at the same time, she had an idea that this cantankerous old man would be in future more of an ally than an enemy. Twice Mr. Tucker stopped and looked at her, and muttered "You a girl, bless

me! I never would have thought it; and them gates, well, to be sure!"

Lavvy never had any difficulty in making herself pleasant, she had been acquainted all her life with all sorts and conditions of people. Before the house was reached Mr. Tucker made one more halt. "I'll tell you what," he said, "I'll put 'untin' gates to those wire fences before November."

Charles Badsworth riding a little distance behind said to Jack Morgan:—

"Lavvy will twist that cantankerous old man round her finger, see if she doesn't, just as she would twist me."

Jack felt a peculiar satisfaction in the way in which Charles Badsworth addressed him; he had loyally kept his promise to Lavvy but he didn't at all like doing it.

"She went splendidly," he remarked. "I hardly think either Ned or I should have negotiated those last three gates on our blown horses if she hadn't gone first. It impressed us as much as it seems to have impressed old S. T."

"Lavvy's a nice light-weight," Mr. Badsworth replied, looking down at his own horse.

At the iron railings which separated the parterre from what Mr. Tucker called the park, Lavvy stopped.

"Won't you come in, miss?" the old gentleman asked.

"I think I will stay with my hounds in case of more trouble," Lavvy replied with a smile which made Mr. Tucker grunt at his previous want of perception as he bustled off to the house to give the necessary orders.

Lavvy mounted her horse; in case of the arrival of Mrs. Tucker and her daughters she felt there would be an advantage in being on horseback. By good luck the ladies had gone out to luncheon, so Mr. Tucker dispensed his hospitality unaided save by domestics, whose sphere of usefulness was much interfered with by the contradictory orders of their master.

"Go and take the sherry across to her, you young fool," he said in a loud aside to his son, who, with a cigarette in his mouth, lounged on the front steps. "You might do

worse; there's money, too, over yonder," nodding in the direction of Cranston. "Then I'll go myself," he added, as his son contemplated a pair of patent leather slippers and said nothing.

Whether it was Lavvy's easy manner, or the recollection of "them gates," that influenced Mr. Tucker, matters not. At dinner that evening he delivered an eulogistic address to his family on the subject. For a moment during the afternoon when he realised that the last gate was badly damaged his anger was rekindled; he got caught in the rain which came on suddenly and was much ruffled; but a note from Miss Badsworth received later regretting that damage had been accidentally done and requesting that any expenses of repairs should be forwarded to her, put him in good-humour once more; he made a careful estimate for the gate and broken lock, folded it up and placed it in an envelope and regarded it with a satisfied air; he smoked a cigar and looked at it, then he turned it over and turned it back again so that the superscription lay uppermost, finally he grunted, tore it up and wrote a note to Miss Badsworth to say that the damage was trifling and of no consequence.

"The little lady jumped 'em, I saw her do it," he muttered. "She's a nice gal to my thinking, and Edwin's a fool if he doesn't look in there." Then he went to dress for dinner.

"How was she dressed, Edwin?" the eldest Miss Tucker asked when her father had retired to smoke his post-prandial cigar and the rest of the family lingered over coffee.

"Just like a man—velvet cap, red coat, white breeches and top-boots. I expect she's pretty lively."

"How disgusting," said Mrs. Tucker.

"To give the devil his due, somehow she didn't look odd, mater. The governor dressed her down in his best style, thinking she was a man, and somehow found his mistake and was all treacle; he says he is going to buy another horse."

"And he's offered a thousand pounds to Prue or me when we ride over one of those white gates," Miss Tucker said.

"I suppose a bold, mannish girl is an attraction to men," Mrs. Tucker remarked sourly. "I trust, Edwin, you will not endanger your prospects."

"No fear, mater," replied Edwin, thinking of a somewhat compromising document which a certain barmaid in the vicinity of Cambridge refused to give up except at a price which did not suit the finances of Mr. Tucker, junior.

A pouring wet afternoon, little or no scent, and consequently hard work for the huntsman and no sport, concluded the day for the Cranston hounds.

"Give it up and go home, Lavvy," her father had counselled at last, and she was only too glad to act on the advice.

Six miles home in a wet coat and leathers damps the ardour of the best and bravest. Jack Morgan noted that the girl was dead beat and wretched in her soaked condition, so he rode up alongside of the wearied huntsman and imparted some of his merry good-humour to the depressing surroundings. Never was Lavvy more grateful for anything. A man who can be cheerful in spite of depressing circumstances is at all times to be admired.

"Uncle Hugo was quite right," Lavvy said after a time, taking off her cap and shaking the water from it. "How I hate this rain all down my neck."

"Don't you believe it, he was all wrong. It would have made him sit up to see you to-day. You tackled old Tucker first-rate."

"It was dad who gave him 'what for'."

"Perhaps; but you stood the brunt in style."

The reply slipped out unawares.

"I didn't mind him, I knew you were close by."

Jack made no comment; he felt content despite the weather.

CHAPTER XXX.

Miss Lavvy's success, or Miss Lavvy's shortcomings, were weighed by all sorts and conditions of persons who dwelt within the boundaries of the Cranston Hunt; knowledge of the noble science was certainly not universal. A good day or a bad day was often calculated upon personal conditions. For instance, those who happened to be at hand when suddenly a long, dragging, sportless day was electrified by a brilliant twenty minutes to ground, went home contented and with nothing but commendation of the tired little girl who had pulled herself together and gone in front from end to end.

Even Major Creswell, who from vantage ground had watched the proceedings, and by virtue of a favouring bend in the fox's line had been handy at the finish, acknowledged that the little red-coated figure on the grey (Lavvy was riding a grey horse) had the best of it all the way, and withdrew his previously stated opinion that you couldn't expect sport with a woman to draw the coverts. Those who had gone home early and so missed the fun gave vent to gloomy forebodings as to a shortage of foxes. Alf Diccox, on the other hand, accounted for the absence of the required animal by the fact that the previous day having been wet with every sign of a wet night to follow, "them chaps had 'put to' the earths too early so as to save a drenchin'".

In fact, people brought their own weights and measures wherewith to appraise Miss Lavvy, and cared not that the standard mark was wanting. One thing few could deny (and those were they who were seldom at hand): Miss Lavvy, owing to plenty of nerve and a devotion to her hounds, had

a happy knack of being on the spot. Twice she incurred the displeasure of the field and yet took home an additional laurel for her crown. On each occasion she had a beaten fox before her which took refuge in a covert, and on each occasion, after slow twisting work, hounds came merrily away. Whether Joe Summers quoted from Peter Beckford or from his own experience matters not; he had been careful to explain to his pupil that when certain hounds had been at the head of affairs during a run, and the pack came away from a covert with a different lot in front and an improved scent, it was tolerably certain they had changed foxes.

The field grumbled when Lavvy stopped the pack and got back to the covert, but each time she had the luck to pick up her fox.

"They chopped a fresh fox," Captain Majendie asserted the first time, sufficiently loudly for Lavvy to hear above the baying of hounds.

She set the dead fox up on four stiff legs and said "Just so" over her shoulder, whereupon a laugh went round at the Captain's expense.

The opening meet was fixed for Casselton, as it had been for many a year, and Lady Flora Parkfield gave a dinner party the previous evening.

There was much speculation as to whether Miss Badsworth herself would carry the horn on the following day in accordance with the provisions of Hugo Badsworth's Will, and there was much disappointment amongst the invited guests when they found that Miss Badsworth and her brother arrived unaccompanied by what they had begun to speak of as "the wonderful girl". Why they had come to the conclusion that her present occupation would unfit her for the social circle did not appear, for few had seen her in private life; but some people require no reason for their prejudices.

"She's one of the nicest girls I ever met," Lady Flora remarked with decision, in reply to a pumping question on the part of the Duchess. "I'm glad to say she often comes to

see me. Horsey? Not a bit of it, you might be with her a whole evening and she would never mention horse or hound. Like her aunt, she's a lady to the backbone. I'm sorry she cannot be here, but she works too hard to keep late hours, and there is to-morrow, of course."

"But doesn't Miss Badsworth hunt the hounds to-morrow?" the Duchess asked.

"Miss Badsworth is master, certainly, but I don't see why she should carry the horn."

"But the Will, you know."

"Well, the Will mentions Lavinia Badsworth."

"But I thought——"

"To be sure, Duchess, so have a great many more. Lavinia is the name. I expect the nephew will kick up a shindy, but he won't have a leg to stand on. Here *is* Miss Badsworth, punctual as usual."

Lady Flora stated her opinion in a firm voice which gave no sign that she possessed any doubts.

Very graceful and very handsome Miss Badsworth looked, and Charles Badsworth was even more like the late Squire of an evening than during the day.

Genial and chatty as they both were, there was a certain dignity about the pair which put any questions on the much-ventilated subject out of the running.

Lady Flora discussed everything except hunting, and when the ladies had retired from the dining-room not even Major Creswell broached the subject in Charles Badsworth's presence.

. . . . . .

Mr. John Morgan of Newnton, on the one hand, and Mr. Victor Bickersdyke on the other, were the two people who, from different points of view, regarded the coming of the opening day with special interest.

Morgan wondered what steps, if any, Bickersdyke would take if Miss Badsworth failed to carry the horn, and Bickersdyke calculated the chances of his aunt undertaking, at the last moment, work which he was informed she had not as

yet attempted. Captain Majendie assured him that hunting hounds was a thing which no one could take up at a moment's notice (though he was prepared to do it himself), but to this Victor replied, "There was no saying what a woman would try to do".

Victor had dined at Cranston to meet his uncle, and had gone over full of determination to state his intentions. For some time he had entertained the idea of some sort of compromise as being the easiest and cheapest method of business, but there was something in Charles Badsworth's eyes which he never could meet with confidence, and his aunt was no longer like the timid bather testing the temperature of the water with a cautious foot; she had taken the plunge and was—well, as Hugo Badsworth had prophesied—all the better for it.

Moreover, Jack Morgan was of the party at Cranston, and though Miss Lavvy had disappeared when dinner was over, and showed no outward preference for his rival, Bickersdyke recalled Majendie's words: "Don't be a fool; stick to the whole lot". So, like Pharaoh of old, his heart was hardened.

Charles Badsworth and the surviving executor of his late brother's Will held a consultation in the smoking-room at Cranston, which lasted far into the night or early morning, the text for which was Mr. Badsworth's question:—

"What do you think he intends to do?"

"He has said nothing to me," Jack replied, "but rumour has it that he intends to get an injunction or something of the sort."

"That would be awkward with the season well advanced. What do you imagine we should have to do?"

"Carry on the hunt with a separate account in case things go against us," Jack replied. "Of course I don't know your views, sir, but personally I should try bounce, and treat the matter as though the name Lavinia settled the whole business."

"Hum!" Mr. Badsworth remarked. "It will be a pity if we have to throw away thousands on litigation. I have

never had much to squander, but the only money I have ever grudged has been paid away in lawyers' fees. Bounce? Well, there is something in it with a man like Victor, who is an unmitigated ass, but not so great a one as Hugo was. Do you know anything of that man Majendie?" he went on.

Jack was reminded of a similar question put to him in a certain green lane by a girl in a sailor hat and patent habit. He smiled to himself at the thought, and forgot to make answer until Mr. Badsworth repeated the question.

"Not much," he then replied—"personally, that is; but Rogers, who was formerly butler here and now is landlord of the Crown and Cushion at Allington, told me the other day that he is going, so he says, to hunt the hounds for Victor Bickersdyke, for the consideration of five hundred pounds per annum and all found, when Miss Badsworth gives up."

"The devil he is! Damn him!"

"I fancy that is why he is always trying to interfere."

There was a long pause, during which each man thought his own thoughts. Presently Morgan rose to go. "We shall soon know the ropes, sir, now," he said, putting his hand on the back of the curious oak chair in which he had so often seen Hugo Badsworth seated at his writing table. It was owing to no reminiscence of that sort that Jack's hand now rested lightly on the carved back with something akin to reverence in its touch; it was because he had once seen a curly head leaning back against it whilst perplexed eyes surveyed the bookcase opposite, and he was under the impression that that had not been the only occasion.

"With your permission, sir, I shall bounce when I see an opportunity," he said.

"So do," Charles Badsworth replied laughing. "At all events I will bounce that Majendie chap into his proper place whilst I'm here, that's to say if he hasn't got over the last occasion; I won't have my little girl interfered with. What an infernal fool Hugo was!"

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Three white frosts and a gale of wind had upset all the prognostications that the country would be so blind as to be unridable when November came in. That transformation had taken place which nature undergoes at the approach of winter, sometimes so gradually that it steals in well-nigh unobserved, sometimes so suddenly that the whole landscape is altered in a single night. This latter was the case when the 2nd of November dawned, the day of the Cranston opening meet.

"Crisp and bright; probably no scent," Jack Morgan said as he stretched himself whilst his man drew up the blinds, arranged his hunting kit and placed a neatly folded brown paper parcel on a vacant chair.

Jack Morgan's toilette was approaching completion ere he noticed it; he had passed through the arduous ordeal of tying the bows at the knees of a brand new pair of breeches to his satisfaction, and had drawn on one brilliant top-boot and inserted the hooks in the loops of the other when his eye fell on that parcel and its superscription. He must have recognised the handwriting, for he threw down the boot in a manner which would have shocked his servant, and made a dash for the package, failing to notice what a difference even a thin boot makes in the evenness of one's progress when the other foot is but stockinged.

"Lavvy's handwriting, undoubtedly; what could it be?" he thought, turning it over and carefully feeling the edges. Flat, firm, and folded with professional accuracy, the parcel itself kept its secret without giving the faintest hint. Great minds have often proved their worth in emergencies (at least, so we are told, though there are instances when what the world calls little minds have gone one better). Sam Weller advised his parent to solve the problem of "Who could have written to him?" by opening the letter, and the same idea occurred to Jack, necessitating more unequal progress to the dressing table to procure some instrument wherewith to sever the string. Did any one, under hurried conditions, ever find knife or scissors? Jack did not, though they were

both staring him in the face. A razor became a ready substitute, and this may be taken as evidence of blind eagerness on the part of the young man to whom a razor, a specially good razor, was an instrument to be treated with motherly care.

The outer wrapper was rapidly removed, only to reveal a second; the removal of the second laid bare a third; the third in its turn covered a fourth. "Was it a practical joke?" Jack thought.

"No." The answer came to him as the fourth covering joined the heap of paper on the floor.

A coat, a red coat, stained and purpled by use and stress of weather, but folded flat as though hydraulic pressure had been used. A strip of paper pinned to the flannel lining bore the legend:—

"With very many thanks. Lavvy."

Jack waded clear of the sheets of brown paper and gently shook out the coat as though it had been constructed of antique point lace and held it at arm's-length with both hands; it was the front view, and the Cranston Hunt buttons were dingy from exposure; then he turned it round and viewed the back. Messrs. Lappel & Stock's work had been good; there was no outward and visible sign to show where the alterations had been made in order to make the garment fit Miss Lavinia Badsworth's slim figure.

For just one moment Jack Morgan was puzzled as to the meaning of that parcel, and he sat down on the edge of his bed and spread the coat over the knees of his spotless breeches. It occurred to him that this was the first day of regular hunting, though the season might be said to have been begun a fortnight before. This was the day when the huntsman and hunt servants would appear in all the grandeur of a brand new turn-out, and so—he went back to a hot morning in June when Lavvy had asked the loan of a stained coat, and he smiled as he thought of the merry brown eyes which would have twinkled over the making up of the parcel. Taking it altogether it was satisfactory, and

he went so far as to imagine that there was a subtle something about this war-stained garment which conveyed the idea of personality, the personality of the one girl as far as he was concerned.

In itself it may be doubted whether this idea, taken in the abstract, was a compliment to Miss Lavvy. A coat in which a huntsman has done work, and even temporarily stowed in its pockets a draggled fox's brush, or a pad or two, differs from the tiny lace handkerchief with its memory of scent; a glove; a bow of ribbon; a broken fan; but yet to the good man and true it matters not, one and all have their associations, dead and gone perhaps, but still marked in memory, starting points of future efforts, labelled success or failure as the case may be, and yet possessing something which makes them dear whatever may have happened since.

"Your breakfast's waiting, sir," said a voice at the door.

"Right," was the reply, but Jack Morgan carefully folded that red coat and laid it smooth and flat at the bottom of a drawer, turning the key in the lock and placing it on his dressing table, where, of course, he forgot it, and his servant finding it, inspected the drawer which it fitted, and smiled. What matter? Jack took the influence out with him, which made the day seem brighter than his own new coat.

Charles Badsworth, as a practical man, finished his breakfast and folded his napkin in accordance with his invariable practice before he made any remarks beyond his forecast of the weather. He was perfectly aware that his sister was turned out in the most approved style, that her hair, here and there streaked with grey, was plaited in a thick coil low down on her neck, and was surmounted by a silk hat which became the wearer well; he had noted the hunt buttons on both coat and waistcoat, the neat scarf and bunch of violets; he was unable to find any fault in his daughter's costume, complete in all details as it was, a facsimile of the portrait of her uncle opposite which she sat. He must, however, have been thinking his own thoughts, and according to his

kindly nature sympathising with the two women in the ordeal through which they were passing, though without an outward sign in either case. Presently he leant back in his chair and laughed that boyish laugh which Lavvy loved to hear, and which Miss Badsworth had begun to regard as a sort of mental tonic.

"Never mind," he said, as though either or both ladies had expressed their inmost feelings. "Never mind, we shall get out of it somehow. It's the very funniest thing that has occurred in modern days, and really if he foresaw it, one would be bound to reckon Hugo a wit instead of a fool. I will say this, I believe you two are the pluckiest women in existence; talk of Joan of Arc, indeed!"

"We haven't been talking about her, dad. Do you think she got tired of being Joan of Arc?"

"Hadn't time, child; though I have always thought it a pity she didn't knock off after her first great success."

"Well, I won't err in the same way, dad; eight or nine more days and then my work will be done."

"You've shown very good sport, child; it would be a pity not to hold on to the end of the season if you don't find the work too hard."

"Now, don't talk nonsense, Charles. Hugo was perfectly right, there are things which a man can do and a woman cannot, that is, without great personal sacrifice; when November is out, whatever happens, Lavvy shall be free as far as the hounds are concerned."

Miss Badsworth spoke with an air of authority which took her brother's fancy.

"You're quite a different person, Lavinia, from what you were when I renewed my acquaintance with you. You have shown real pluck, and, forgive me, it has done you a lot of good to have to do it."

"I know what you mean, Charles," Miss Badsworth said smilingly. "Poor Hugo!"

"I don't know so much about poor Hugo. I'm not clear about his saneness yet. It's that twinkle in his eye there"

(looking at the portrait) "that puzzles me. How many couples to-day, Lavvy?"

"Seventeen and a half, dad. Joe Summers recommends a small pack; he says there is sure to be a crowd."

"Your aunt and I will keep them in order, never fear. I shall have my eye on that chap Majendie. Morgan tells me he is to take your place when Victor establishes his claim."

"Do you think he will, Charles?" Miss Badsworth asked in a tone of voice which bespoke misgivings.

"Hunt the hounds? Majendie?"

"I meant Victor."

"He *may*, of course; but as the hero says in the play, it will be over our dead bodies."

"Whose, dad?"

"Your aunt's and mine and—Morgan's."

"Don't forget mine, dad," Lavvy said at the door, closing it in time to hide the rosy tinge which, of course, went badly with a red coat.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"ALL is fair in love and war," says the adage which has found acceptance for many a year. Possibly it is a rule which has exceptions, at least in calmer moments we can certainly devise circumstances into which the spirit of fair-play would not have entered.

When Captain Majendie and the sporting young doctor from Allington were, with one or two more, the guests of the officers of the cavalry depôt at Mulchester, it occurred to them at a late sitting in a corner of the ante-room that there would be no harm in providing themselves with a good gallop on the occasion of the opening meet of the Cranston at Casselton, and they came to the conclusion that there would be no danger of discovery at the hands of a girl.

"Hunting is all very well when you get a clinking good gallop," said one young subaltern with more money than brains. "I confess if I go out to ride I like to ride, and hate the pottering about."

Majendie, a little sore from the straightforward speech of Mr. Badsworth, and the arm's-length treatment of Miss Badsworth and her niece, thought it might be well to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness and pay off a score or two at the same time; so eventually it was agreed, out of hearing of any senior officer, that arrangements should be made by which a certain run should be secured over a certain line of country, terminating at a certain river at a point where neither ford nor bridge was immediately at hand. Moreover funds were subscribed and taken charge of by Majendie, who had in his eye a certain loafer of the neighbourhood who for half the amount would carry out the necessary details.

It was a well-known fact that according to custom Casselton Ashbed, a mile away from Casselton itself, would be the first covert drawn. Later in the season it was almost a sure find, but when the leaves of the ash trees lay in semi-green heaps after the first sharp frost or two, it was more than doubtful, but then Heyleaze was close by.

Alf Diccox, equally according to custom, walked round early to "see how things was," as he put it. Twice he had been delayed by little business matters with two small farmers *en route*, so that he was somewhat late and disinclined to pause when he arrived at the Ashbed, for Lady Flora Parkfield's hospitality extended to the rank and file of the spectators, and withal, as we know, the home-brewed ale was of the best.

To his astonishment, though he showed no sign, on the road immediately beneath the covert, he met Bill Hart coming in the opposite direction to that in which Casselton lay. That in itself was suspicious, and raised Alf's curiosity in view of the above-named hospitality; moreover, Bill had evidently fortified himself already against the labours of the day.

"Mornin', Bill," said one. "Mornin', Alf," said the other. As a rule, Bill was as talkative as Alf was reticent; on this occasion he passed on as if anxious to avoid criticism, whereat Alf wondered the more. He rarely asked questions but he liked finding things out.

There was a contrast between the two, for Bill Hart was a long, leggy scarecrow of a man, whose good times in this life had never been able to overcome the bad times of a semi-vagrant existence. Bill Hart was one who could work and work well, but he always knocked off when possessed of funds sufficient to enable him "to go on the drink," after which bout he began again.

A few steps farther on Alf Diccox was conscious of a slightly pungent odour; it brought back to his memory the time when "the children had them bad coughs". "Aniseed; p'r'aps it was medicine Bill was taking somewhere, p'r'aps it wasn't."

Neither man looked round for each expected the other to do so. It was when a bend of the road made things safe that Bill left the beaten track, and Alf proceeded to stalk him.

It took Diccox a considerable time to reach higher ground, and then nothing was to be seen of Bill Hart. A few cattle were scattered here and there in the vale below, a man was cutting hay from a rick half a mile away, but otherwise there was nothing moving.

"Better get on to Casselton," Alf said, and was on the point of moving when something away down below caught his eye—a man, a man running with a long, steady stride, going straight across the country. Alf saw him stop at a fence, throw something over, and make a slight detour to some rails, then back and on again.

"Must see the young lady, we must," Alf said to his terriers, looked at his watch and hesitated. What had he better do? Wait at the covert side? No, there would be time to meet the hounds on the road. So he set off at his best pace.

In the meantime a large company of horsemen and horsewomen had assembled at Casselton, to whom were added carriage folk of all denominations and the balance of the neighbourhood on foot, with the exception of some of the wrathful motorists, whose machines, by Lady Flora's strict orders, were not permitted within the lodge gates.

Anxious and curious eyes were turned in the direction whence hounds would come. The anxious eyes belonged to Victor Bickersdyke, the curious to those desirous of seeing the lady huntsman.

The Duchess and Lady Susan, well mounted as any women could be, were in close conversation with Lady Flora. The Misses Tucker, well turned out but looking somewhat anxious, endeavoured to elicit from their brother, who had been of the party at Mulchester, what he meant by saying "They would see some fun presently".

Mr. Silas Tucker accompanied his wife in a landau.

Major Creswell discussed the points of a new horse which refused to stand still, and declared that hounds were sure to be late. There was the usual kicker of which people fought shy, and the cavalry division full of ride and orange gin. The farmer element was there in its strength, at least would be presently, when they had done justice to Lady Flora's hospitality.

It was precisely three minutes to eleven by the stable clock when some one said "'Ere's the 'ounds, anyway," and the sun fell upon the velvet caps, the new red coats, and the shifting shades of colour amongst the hounds.

"Baik, Bushman!" Ned Barlow said to a hound who, a little wide of the pack, inspected with a solemn face a perambulator drawn up beneath the laurels, to the no small terror of its occupant.

"Good morning, Mrs. West," exclaimed Lavvy, recognising the wife of a retainer in the mother of the infant.

"Good morning, miss—well I never, to be sure," was the reply, accompanied by a hesitating curtsey.

"No, I don't suppose you ever did," Lavvy laughed as she rode on, and pulled up within a few yards of the spot where on a summer morning we saw her once before.

Whatever Miss Badsworth felt she looked perfectly at her ease as she shook hands with Lady Flora on the carriage drive. The elder lady chatted according to her wont on all manner of things, whilst at the same time she took in every detail.

"Quite right, my dear, a silk hat, so becoming; after the slipshod bowlers it's quite refreshing; poor Harry would no more have let me go out hunting without one than without —Ah! There's the little girl. I must go and speak to her. I suppose you draw the Ashbed first. I doubt if you'll find there, but there is no saying; go in and have something. Duncombe!"

A man in velveteen climbed up the haha wall and saluted; a conference took place and her ladyship waved her oak stick in various directions.

She was not, however, emulating King Nebuchadnezzar amongst the hanging gardens of Babylon; she was only discussing routes to what Duncombe had described as "Them clumps where a fox was apt to lie now the leaf was falling," and which were situated below the Ashbed.

"You had better go and tell Miss Lavinia Badsworth," Lady Flora said, pointing with her stick to Lavvy, towards whom sundry of the field had gravitated.

Lavvy displayed much outward calmness, though from time to time she looked furtively for the signal from her aunt. Duncombe delivered his message and stated his opinion, and thus it was that when the hounds moved off across the park they missed Alf Diccox on the road.

Generations of sportsmen and sportswomen have observed that if you don't trot on with the hounds you are speedily left a mile behind; still there is always a prevalent idea that there is plenty of time, and to tell the truth there was a want of faith in those who were aware that the keepers' clumps were to be run through. Two larch rails on either side of what was called "the green drive" in the park, over which the Banker and the hunt servants' horses popped in a matter-of-fact way, set others squibbing and bucking, and the amount of daylight between rider and saddle in some cases emphasised the remark of Major Creswell that "small places often gave bad falls"; hence congestion at a neighbouring gate and some strong words from the Duchess to a youth who she said had taken unwarrantable precedence and had jostled her daughter. So it came about that Lavvy had run the hounds through two of the small plantations and had cracked her whip outside the third and last ere the main body of the field had done more than arrive within sight. Not a sound beyond the girl's clear voice, not a whimper reached them, so they made tracks for the Ashbed at once.

Now it is difficult to ride with the hounds and run with the hunted animal, be it what it may, at the same time, so the two things must be treated separately.

Bill Hart, when once he was off, was a good and persistent

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"JUST THE PLACE A FOX 'ED GET IN."

runner; he carried no flesh, and the gin and beer he had imbibed speedily evaporated; moreover the prospect of an extra sovereign if he reached the before-mentioned river at a certain place and made himself scarce, stimulated his efforts, so that by the time he had been going an hour he had put some few miles between himself and the Ashbed.

There were, however, two good miles of country to be crossed before he reached his goal, so he came to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to make a check, and the Berrington brickfields seemed a suitable spot. Half a mile on, the old, blackened, disused kilns showed out on the rising ground, with here and there a ruined cottage or dilapidated shed. "Just the place a fox 'ed get in," he said, "and by the time they finds he ain't there and makes a cast I shall have done my job."

The brickyard, which had been disused for several years, was still strongly fenced. There were pits and excavations of varied character; portions of an old tramway; long lines of little wood-covered shelters, where the fresh-made bricks had been dried, all in various stages of decay; deeply-rutted tracks; and, moreover, above each spot where coarse vegetation could take a hold, rough grass and gigantic docks. Trailing the drag behind him Bill made for the larger of the two kilns; he would make believe that the quarry had got in behind the ruined brickwork. He forced his way through docks and nettles waist high and more till suddenly there was a sound of breaking boards, and then he disappeared.

. . . . . .

Now the Ashbed was a long narrow covert bisected from end to end by a boggy swamp impassable on horseback. The lower side was comparatively flat, the other sloped upwards till it terminated in a steep wooded bank.

Joe Summers, her father and experience had taught Lavvy that hounds draw upwards on a slope, so she entered the wood at the lower side, whilst Ned Barlow rode round to get forward at the top.

Scarcely had the girl watched the hounds spread them-

selves keenly and encouraged them once or twice, and scarcely had Ned Barlow done more than reach the summit, when there came the sound of a distant holloa, lusty but not professional, and quickly it was repeated.

"A holloa away, forrard, ma'am," Ned shouted.

Lavvy's horn was out and at her lips in a trice, whilst Ned on the high ground cracked his whip and gave vent to "Gar away on! Hark, holloa, hark!"

All was bustle, part of the pack got to their huntsman as she galloped down the ride, whilst the rest made the best of their way towards the holloa, which was repeated several times.

"Hounds, please! Hounds!" Lavvy cried as at length she reached the end of the covert and found a boggy gap full of blundering horses and timid riders. There was a rail on the bank to one side of the crowd; the rail was low but the bank was high, hence the struggle for the easy place; to Lavvy and the Banker it was a vision of home; the take off was boggy, but fortunately the rail was rotten and its splinters spread devastation amongst the crowd as the horse landed on the sound ground beyond followed by a cataract of hounds.

"My goodness! Who would believe that was a girl!" Major Creswell exclaimed, regaining his saddle after a doubtful moment owing to a desperate plunge of his horse.

It was not until Lavvy had risen the hill that she could form any idea of what was taking place. Then she saw, two fields away, eight couples of hounds strung out more than was their wont, and several red and black coats in attendance. Ned Barlow was doing his best wide on her right.

Now, it was fortunate (for Charles Badsworth would have nothing to do with anything that had not plenty of blood) that the Banker's pedigree had but one slight stain in it, and that consequently his turn of speed was of the best, for as usual a stern chase is a long one; he quickly dropped Ned Barlow, and drew up to those who had the

disadvantage of weight. The hounds which Lavvy was bringing along were making every effort to get up to the leaders with only partial success. Presently those in front disappeared, then they reappeared on the rising ground. Two things puzzled Lavvy: one was that hounds were almost mute (a rare event with the Cranston), and the other that they strung out in a long line. They ran straight without the semblance of a check, so that sheer galloping was the only chance of getting up.

Luckington Wood, on the extreme of the Cranston country, appeared, and Lavvy and possibly some others decided this to be the fox's point; but no, there was not a waver of the line in its direction, and hounds ran on and into the Tinbury country. By-and-by there were blown horses, occasional empty saddles, and at Luckington village Lavvy saw the leaders, with whom she was beginning to get on terms, turn away to the left to make a detour; she knew nothing of this part of the country and for a moment she hesitated; then a chestnut horse, covered with lather, drew up alongside, and Jack Morgan's cheery voice cried, "This way, we can get over down here". A short field lane ended in a narrow grass meadow, and Jack took a pull at his horse.

"Give me room and come fast," he shouted over his shoulder. "It's the only place, and they don't seem to know it."

Lavvy watched him and took her cue. Thirty yards from the willow tree in front Jack put on the steam, and in another moment was galloping safely on the other side of a brook, and with no sign of hesitation the Banker followed suit. It was Ned Barlow, a hundred yards behind, who knocked up the water and cleverly saved a fall.

"A grand gallop," Jack gasped.

Lavvy was in front now, and near enough to see the leading hounds. She could not understand what had happened; instead of running in a cluster and carrying a head, they were still strung out; two couples of young hounds had the lead and occasionally spoke to the scent, but there

were those who usually drove to the front back in the ruck and running mute.

"What can they be running?" she gasped.

"A fox; he was holloaed," was all Jack could say.

"They're mute," was the reply.

"Pace," said he.

And so they went on still hardly on terms till Berrington brickfields hove in sight; a field short of them Jack's horse came down. Majendie, the doctor and two of the cavalry division, who had lost their places in the detour, were close behind. Jimmy Edwards, who had been under the impression that Luckington was the fox's point, was using his knowledge to the best advantage.

At the brickfields hounds threw up and Lavvy got to them, making as quick a cast as was consistent with the blown Banker round the outside. Of course we are not surprised to hear that the cast was a failure.

Having naturally no suspicion of what had occurred, and imagining that a fox who had come so straight and well might have taken refuge at the spot, Lavvy dismounted, hitched the reins on the fence and climbed over it. The stragglers came up one by one and watched her wading waist high in the docks and nettles. It was all in vain, though Ned Barlow joined her in the quest.

A few hounds were busy at one spot, and on investigation Lavvy trod on a loose board.

"Take care, ma'am," Ned exclaimed. "There's a well or something. Get baik!" to the clustering hounds.

Then both were startled by a voice from the depths: "Help me out! I've fell in!"

"Why, that's Bill Hart!" Ned exclaimed. "Are you hurt?" he asked of the depths.

"No. I bein't hurt none, only there's a foot o' water, or more."

Ned stooped down and picked up a string and slowly drew it up. On the end was a draggled piece of fur.

"What's that?" Lavvy asked.

"They've been playing a trick, ma'am. It's a drag. I wondered to see 'em strung out so."

Lavvy flushed crimson with anger. It was an insult, a trick played on a woman who could not defend herself.

"How deep is the well?" she asked shortly.

"About twelve foot, I reckon," said Bill's voice.

"And you are not hurt?"

"No, I bein't hurt."

"Then you can stay there. We're out of our country, we can't dig out."

She walked with as much dignity as a pair of top-boots worn amongst old bricks covered by docks permitted to the spot where the Banker was being led about by a small boy.

"I suppose he's got in," Majendie called to her.

"Yes."

"Aren't you going to have him out?"

"It's not our country."

Lavvy mounted her horse and went back to the road; her shoulders were very square, and she looked straight in front of her.

"What are you going to do next, Lavvy?" her father asked.

"Go home." Then, putting her hand on the cantle of her saddle and turning round, she added, "Some people, who can have no claim to be gentlemen, have insulted me. If anybody wants to know who they are, they can ask Bill Hart at the bottom of the well yonder, he will probably know."

Miss Lavvy rode slowly back towards Cranston.

"What the deuce does she mean?" Mr. Badsworth asked.

"We had better go back and see," Jack Morgan suggested.

And they went, and Jimmy Edwards went too.

. . . . . .

"It was somewhere about here that the longest time was spent," Jack said, when the trio had waded some distance in the coarse herbage and rubbish. "Miss Lavvy mentioned a well, we had better mind where we are going."

The Squire of Dewthorpe stopped. "Hullo!" he shouted.

A muffled reply came from somewhere underground in the vicinity, and Charles Badsworth made his way cautiously in the direction of the sound.

"Here's the place," he presently called over his shoulder, and kneeling down peered into what seemed to be impenetrable darkness. "Hullo!" he called once more.

Now, though Mr. Badsworth could see nothing, Bill Hart below could plainly distinguish a head and face apparently looking down on him.

An hour or so spent at the bottom of a twelve-foot well with the sole companionship of two feet of clay and muddy water can scarcely be called exhilarating, and no doubt has a tendency to shake nerves which in their time have been severely tested by drink.

To Bill Hart so situated there appeared the face of the late Squire of Cranston, and to the vision was added a voice which he had in times past heard on the magisterial bench and elsewhere. Any spirit of bravado which Bill might have planned to display at the time of rescue evaporated, and it was something between a groan and cry of terror from which his words emanated: "Oh, Lord! He's come for me; and I saw 'im buried!"

Charles Badsworth assumed a partially erect position, narrowly escaping sitting back on his spurs, and burst into a hearty laugh. It was some seconds before he could ask "How far down are you?"

"A matter o' twelve foot or so," was the reply. "I can't get no holt anywhere, it's all slippery clay down here and crumblin' stuff above." Mr. Badsworth's laugh had reassured Bill somewhat.

Jimmy Edwards suggested a combination of stirrup leathers as a means of rescue, and in due course three pairs were looped together. With Jack Morgan lying flat and Mr. Badsworth and Jimmy Edwards holding him by the legs, after one or two failures (Jack's boots were nearly pulled off) the clay-besmirched Bill Hart was brought to the surface.

He was a pitiable object as he stood with chattering teeth and an abject expression on his face as Charles Badsworth accompanied his words, "Now, then, what have you got to say?" by picking up his whip and measuring carefully the doubled thong.

Jack Morgan's wrath at the insulting trick played on Miss Lavvy could not withstand poor Bill's look of terror.

"Better sell him to Midianitish merchantmen, if you can see any," he said.

Jimmy Edwards grinned, and Mr. Badsworth's eyes twinkled, but he asked sternly:—

"Who paid you?"

Bill had no absurd sense of honour when his own skin was concerned, so he replied "Captain Majendie".

"How much?"

"Ten shillin's down, and a sufferin if I got down to the river."

Mr. Badsworth took out a note-book and wrote this down. Then he eyed the thong of his whip, and Bill's teeth chattered.

"You'd best come down and see Miss Badsworth about it when you've got clean," Mr. Badsworth said, putting his whip under his arm and turning away. "We may as well sort those leathers and get on," he added to his companions.

The hatless Bill watched the three men as they mounted their horses; they said nothing, but Bill was content that he had escaped so easily. It was characteristic of Charles Badsworth that he pulled up his horse before he had ridden fifty yards and called to Bill:—

"Get some bread and cheese and a pint of beer," he said, holding out something as Hart approached with the water squelching in his boots.

"Poor devil, I suppose it wasn't his fault," he said to his companions as he rejoined them. It seemed a sort of apology for his generosity.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Miss Badsworth was rapidly learning the lesson that the duties of a master are not limited by the possession of a pack of hounds, in fact that there were times when she had to assert her authority and give decisions on important questions at a moment's notice. Fortunately for her she was not above sinking the prejudices of the past and acknowledging that in some things the opinions of others were better than her own.

She had gone her best in Jack Morgan's wake until that gentleman, oblivious of the lady who was following and concentrating his energies on the little figure in the red coat and black cap in front, negotiated a big double at the exact spot where the said figure had disappeared momentarily a minute before. Then it was that Miss Badsworth, left to her own devices, with many others got farther and farther behind, until open gates and deeply scarred turf were the only proofs of the line the chase had taken.

Miss Lavvy was two miles or more on her homeward route when she fell in with her aunt and many stragglers, who, under the guidance of Major Creswell (who altered his opinion of what was best to do every five minutes), had taken to the road on the sound decision that "hounds being out of their country were bound to come back to draw again". The only question was, which way?

Lavvy pulled up and beckoned her aunt, with the result that after a conference in low voices, Miss Badsworth said aloud and with decision:—

"You don't say so! Take the hounds home at once, Lavvy. Some trick has been played," she added to the

horsemen and horsewomen who had drawn to the side of the road. "I am sorry to do it, but under the circumstances I have no choice but to send the hounds home."

She trotted on to join her niece and left the members of the field to decide what had happened.

Amongst many others who rode homewards in varying frames of mind were two subalterns of His Majesty's —— Dragoons from the depôt at Mulchester—the one the Hon. George Murdock, the other Mr. Lancelot Browne.

The turn of events culminating in the sending home of the hounds before one o'clock on the opening day had tended to take the glamour out of the plot to which they had been accessories before the fact. They had ridden some distance in silence when Murdock remarked:—

"We had a glorious spin, anyway."

The "anyway" pointed to some blot on the programme.

Browne assented with a certain lack of enthusiasm and there was silence again, which five minutes later Browne broke.

"She's a splendid horsewoman; the way she went on that pony—he is little more—was a sight for sore eyes. How she ever caught us with the start we had I can't imagine."

"You are right, my boy, I was just thinking the same. From what Majendie said I had no idea she was that sort of girl; and couldn't she just flare up when she found out the trick."

"I tell you what it is, Murdock, I feel a beastly brute."

"Same here. I suppose it is because we were found out—at least Majendie will be to a certainty."

"There will be a deuce of a row; that girl, quiet and simple as she looks, isn't going to sit down and say nothing, and from what I hear Miss Badsworth has got a pretty firm hand. I wish we had stood down in this round."

"But we didn't."

"No; but we shan't come in to the show up," Murdock remarked doubtfully.

"Perhaps not, but when one comes to think it over we assisted at playing it very low down on a woman. From what they say, Miss Badsworth had no choice but to take the hounds, and the little girl is undeniably a good sort, one can tell that from the very look of her—seen at a distance."

There was an interval of silence once more, until Murdock, who had evidently been thinking the matter out, asked:—

"What are we going to do about it?"

"It's a beastly job to do, but I don't see what else there is open. As soon as I have changed, I shall borrow Giles's motor and go over to Cranston and apologise. Will you come?"

"Good Lord, I never thought of that, Browne! It's an awful thing to have to do. Suppose we get chucked by the butler, or Miss Badsworth writes to the chief—there is no saying what an angry woman will do. However," hesitatingly, "we are in the same boat, and it's the straight thing to do—I'm there with you. Heavens! what an ordeal! Let us jog on and get it over. I don't so much mind Miss Badsworth, but I wouldn't face the girl just yet for worlds."

Charles Badsworth impressed upon his sister that this was a very serious matter, and that she must put her foot down.

"It's a low trick to play upon a woman," Miss Badsworth said.

Her brother laughed. "Lavinia, my dear, Hugo was right in a way, confound him."

"I'm quite ready to acknowledge it, Charles, *in a way*. One certainly lives and learns. Now tell me what I ought to do and I'll do it."

"Write a curt note to Majendie, and tell him that, unless he offers a handsome apology, the hounds will go home every time he appears in the field. He has got that fool, Victor, at his back, or I would make it stronger."

Miss Badsworth wrote a dignified note and submitted it to her brother.

"Capital! my dear," he said. "It's a regular snorter in the fewest possible words and does you every credit."

In spite of the shadows of what she called her principles, Miss Badsworth received her brother's approval with a certain degree of pride.

. . . . . .

The November afternoon was beginning to close in; there was a grey look in the sky and a keenness in the wind which was chilling, to say the least of it. It was especially chilling to two young men in a motor car, who, wrapped up as they were in garments suitable to an Arctic expedition, for the first time regretted the speed of the car in which they were wont to transgress the statute of speed limitations.

"What the deuce shall we say?" Murdock asked when Cranston hove in sight. There was the ring of despair in his voice.

"Heaven knows. Isn't there something in the Bible about not thinking beforehand?" queried Browne.

"There may be for what I know, but all those good precepts seem to lose their value when you really want them. We had better shut our eyes and go at it."

Mr. Lancelot Browne, acting on his own advice, jumped out of the car the moment it stopped, rang the bell before his courage could evaporate, and stood awaiting the advent of a servant with two cards in his hand.

When the door was thrown open with a majestic swing by a footman, and that functionary had stated that Miss Badsworth was at home, the cards were handed over with a request for a few minutes' interview.

When it was intimated to them that an audience was granted, they hastily peeled off their outer coverings and stood revealed in immaculate dress such as would have done credit to Pall Mall or Piccadilly.

"Go first," said Murdock in a whisper.

"You are senior," was the reply. There was no denying the fact, and they followed the footman in a solemn procession of two.

It was natural that Miss Badsworth should have no suspicion of the object of the visit of the two young warriors, but

she had an instinctive feeling that something unusual belonged to it, and this was confirmed by the appearance of the visitors, who, though they would have displayed no shyness under the ordinary conditions of Society, now evinced an evident desire to get behind one another.

Miss Badsworth had risen from her chair, but something in the uneasiness in the manner of her guests caused her to pause before she advanced to shake hands with them, so instead she asked, "Won't you sit down?"

She remembered she had seen them at the meet that morning, but did not know who they were beyond the fact that their names were on their cards.

Seated uncomfortably on two chairs, with their hats beside them on the floor, the Hon. George Murdock looked at Mr. Lancelot Browne, who in his turn looked at Murdock with an expression which was meant to convey "You are senior".

There was a pause which seemed an eternity to both, and then Murdock dashed into the breach.

"Er—Miss Badsworth, we've come to offer you our humble apologies."

Nothing happened; the earth didn't open, so Mr. Browne added, "We've behaved like—in fact we've played—er—a dirty sort of game, and—er—we're deuced sorry".

Miss Badsworth, now perfectly aware of what was coming, bent her head and said:—

"Perhaps you will kindly explain."

The two young men looked at her; she was very grave and dignified, and they themselves felt unutterably small, but there was a natural softness in the expression in Miss Badsworth's face which fanned their sinking courage.

"We ought to have known better, Miss Badsworth, but the truth is we thought there was only going to be a bit of fun," said Murdock.

"And that we should have a good ride, but it seems from what every one says we made a great mistake, and so we came to say so," said Browne.

"Am I to understand that you two are entirely responsible for what was done to-day?" Miss Badsworth asked.

"Well—er—yes, I suppose so; that is, we sub—we paid for the man."

The two supplied the information alternately.

Of course Miss Badsworth knew from Bill Hart's admission the true state of the case, and she admired the way in which these two boys, as she called them, sought to shield any one but themselves.

"Can you tell me how much was paid?" she asked, drawing a sheet of paper and a pencil towards her. It was rather a poser.

"I should think about three quid—I mean pounds," Murdock replied.

"Yes, divided between two it was thirty shillings apiece," Browne volunteered.

"And cannot you find a better use for your money than in causing annoyance such as this?" Miss Badsworth asked. "I thought you young men, soldiers too, would have been sportsmen, and at all events would have had more chivalrous feelings for women in a difficult position. I cannot suppose you are ignorant of circumstances which are public property in the neighbourhood, and you look old enough" (this was a bad dig, though uttered so smoothly) "to understand the difficulty which must often arise. Perhaps you are not aware that steadiness in hounds" (here she quoted from a tirade of her brother's over his luncheon) "is a most important factor in showing sport, and that my niece has devoted her time and energies right through the summer in endeavouring to reach this end."

"We know there must be a lot of trouble, but we thought——" interrupted Browne.

"Excuse me," Miss Badsworth said, breaking in in her turn, "I don't think you thought at all; you imagined that with a girl to take what should be a man's place" (Oh! Miss Badsworth!) "you might do what you liked and what you wouldn't dare to do if a man had been in Lavinia's

place. Why, you would have been horsewhipped off the field! Because *I* can't horsewhip you, neither can my niece, though it is possible in her present state of mind she would be capable of making the attempt——"

"You could, you know," said Browne, thinking that after all it would be the best solution of the difficulty. "We could only do our best to take punishment."

In spite of herself Miss Badsworth lost her dignity for the moment and smiled.

"No," she said, "*I* like to play *fair*, and I am not at all sure if I horsewhipped you both I should be chastising the real offenders."

"You wouldn't be far wrong if you turned to upon us, Miss Badsworth. I'm almost sorry you are not going to do it. It seems so poor only to be able to say we apologise, and are deuce—awfully sorry."

"As far as I am concerned what you have said is quite sufficient, for I am sure you mean it, and I think I am right in saying it has been a great trial to you to come over and do the proper thing."

"It was the very deuce," said Browne with conviction, though his voice was subdued.

"Very well, as far as you two are implicated I am going to forget the matter, but I must insist upon your apologising to my niece, who is far more hurt than I am. After that I will give you some tea before you go."

It was a painful interview and Miss Badsworth was glad to close it.

The two young men's countenances, which had brightened up gradually, fell as Miss Badsworth rang the bell and instructed the butler: "Take these cards to Miss Lavinia, and tell her that two gentlemen wish to see her in the library".

"She's a sensible girl, but if she does let off a little steam over these youths, it won't hurt them," Miss Badsworth thought.

As for the Hon. Murdock and Mr. Browne, they felt as

though they had been handed over to the tormentors. A girl who hunted hounds and rode undeniably in breeches and boots, a girl whom they had never seen otherwise! A muscular, mannish young woman! Surely the last state was worse than the first! So they thought as they followed the butler in solemn silence.

One shaded lamp threw a light upon a writing-table and served to intensify the gloom in the distant corners of the apartment into which they were ushered. To the youthful warriors' minds it appeared as they entered it a veritable chamber of horrors.

"The Hon. George Murdock and Mr. Browne," proclaimed the butler, and then the door was shut.

Within the circle of the lamplight a girl rose from a curiously carved oak chair, a girl with short curly hair and steady brown eyes; she was clad in a well-made serge dress which showed a rounded, graceful figure, and withal she was a great deal taller than the young men had expected. It puzzled and confused them sorely, for "She was just like any one else," as they put it afterwards.

The pause was longer than had even been the case in the interview with Miss Badsworth, and there came no invitation as yet to be seated, in fact Miss Lavvy remained standing herself.

The Hon. George cleared his throat, but there was no result in speech, so Lavvy, quickly observing, as her aunt had done, that her interviewers were very nervous about something, made the opening move.

"I understand you want to see me about something."

"Well, we didn't, at least I don't mean that, but Miss Badsworth made it a point in her—er—promise of—er—looking over what we had done that we should—er—make our apologies to you, too." Murdock passed his handkerchief over his lips. Browne took up the running.

"Miss Badsworth behaved like a brick—I mean, of course, a very kind person; she might have fired us out, don't you know."

Lavvy guessed what it was all about, but she feigned ignorance; it was quite likely her aunt with her usual good nature had been too merciful.

"If you tell me what you have done I shall understand it better," she said. "You will find chairs close to you." She seated herself and faced the young men at some little distance.

"You see we took a hand—I mean were responsible for that—er—gallop to-day."

"That drag?" Lavvy asked in a steady voice, though she had a strong inclination to burst out laughing at the uneasiness of her visitors. "But you were neither of you the man in the well, he has been fished out since. Did either of you run part of the way and leave Hart to bear the brunt if he was found out—which he was?"

"By Jove, no. Miss Badsworth, we—er—found the money, don't you know, for the man."

"All of it? How much?" Oddly enough, the two culprits thought, Lavvy took up a pencil as her aunt had done.

"About three—er—pounds," Browne replied, thinking it best to tell the same story as before.

"Hart said he received ten shillings, and was to have a sovereign if he got to the river. What was the rest for?"

"'Pon my soul, I thought he was to have it all!" exclaimed the Hon. George, taken off his guard.

"Then all the arrangements were not in the hands of you two?"

"We were just as responsible as any one else."

Lavvy began to like these two youths; she could see that they would not give away any accomplice. Perhaps because she knew who the chief promoter was, perhaps because she was a kind-hearted woman, she persevered no farther with her questions in the same direction. The manifest discomfort of these two young cavalry officers was amusing, but that they were no cowards she felt sure.

"I presume you are unaware that according to what Mr. Beckford says a cat makes the best trail?"

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Browne, eager to propitiate the girl.

"I mention it in order that you may be better provided next time; but I also think you do not know that the same authority states that a trail should never be used after hounds have been stooped to a scent. Just so," as a vacant expression fell on the faces of her audience. "If you hunt as sportsmen it's not a bad thing to learn something about it. You probably go out to ride and ride only. Why don't you have a drag hunt of your own? You have not the smallest idea of the time and trouble expended over bringing a good pack of hounds into the field, and you imagine that because a woman is at the head of affairs here from no choice of her own, and another has to carry the horn, that they are fair game and you may play what tricks you like; and yet if either of them were in danger you would step in without the smallest hesitation to save her if you could. I can't understand it."

Lavvy leaned her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands, and looked fixedly at the two young men, who failed to meet the brown eyes and so did not observe the twinkle in them.

"We are a couple of brutes, and that's what we came to say," Murdock remarked.

"I'm glad you are truthful at all events," Lavvy said. "How long is it since you spun cockchafers?"

"'Pon my word, I don't think I ever did. Did you, Murdock?"

"Never could fancy the things," Murdock replied.

"Boys seem to find some attraction in it," Lavvy said; her conscience told her she was doing something very like it herself. "You, apparently, didn't spin cockchafers, and yet you don't scruple to worry defenceless women. I confess I don't understand it. As far as I can gather, also, your wretched emissary, who got half-drowned in an old well, was only to have half the money contributed. I suppose the rest was kept for another 'gallop'?"

Both Browne and Murdock rose from their chairs simultaneously and commenced to speak at once. Lavvy regarded them steadfastly with her chin still on her hands.

"I'm senior," whispered Murdock, so Browne held his peace.

"Everything you have said Miss Badsworth is true, no doubt, except the last bit: we handed over the money—er—that is——"

"To Captain Majendie—yes, I know," Lavvy said, helping him out.

"If you know it, of course there's no harm."

"None whatever."

"We never thought we were doing so much wrong, and—er—we've come to—er—well, say so and apologise."

Lavvy withdrew her hands and bent her head in acknowledgment.

"It is certainly a matter for my aunt to consider," she said. "I am her secretary only—and her huntsman."

"By Jove!" Mr. Browne said with enthusiasm. "When we saw you get to the front on that pony and cut us all down after so bad a start, we, well, of course, we were sorry, but it was only when we came to think of it we—er—felt brutes."

"And I think you were," Lavvy said demurely.

"We were afraid you would," Murdock said. "Won't you—er—forgive us?" he added penitently.

"I don't suppose, personally, I have anything to forgive. Miss Badsworth is the proper authority."

"Miss Badsworth said——"

"Perhaps she did, but I fancy she was mistaken. I don't think we need say any more."

Lavvy walked across to the bell and rang it. The two young men stood doubtfully; it was not an easy exit and their perplexity was too much for Miss Lavvy. A smile dawned at the corners of her mouth and gradually rippled all over her face. She looked very charming and womanly as she stepped forward and held out her hand.

"We can scarcely part like that after what you have said."

There was some confusion between the hands that were outstretched eagerly to meet hers.

"I think you said you were the senior," selecting Murdock's.

"By Jove, yes; it's an advantage now, but it isn't always, don't you know," he replied.

"Well, good-bye, and don't do it again," Lavvy said as the butler appeared.

Her ears should have been red for the next hour or so by rights.

. . . . . .

"Two nice boys, Lavvy. I felt quite sorry for them," Miss Badsworth said later.

"I've not the least doubt you did, auntie. The carpeting won't hurt them; if I am not mistaken they are staunch champions by this time."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was what Joe Summers had said that tended to restore Lavvy's equanimity. When she arrived at the kennels she left the hounds and rode away after saying, "They've played me a trick, Summers". Ned Barlow had, however, given full details from the moment of the holloa away to that of the discovery of Bill Hart in the well.

"You couldn't have done anything else, miss," Summers had said when Lavvy interviewed him an hour later. "Of course if you'd got away with 'em and seen how they was running it might have been different; but I know that Ashbed and where you were. Bless you, miss, you ain't the only one. Twice they tried it on me, and once they nearly caught me though I was close up; 'twas a bad scenting day as I thought, and then I happened to see the footmarks of a man across a new-sown field of vetches. Once, too, they tried it on the master, but he had no young hounds out, and those he had wouldn't own the line, though some one holloaed and swore a fox was just gone."

"And what did uncle do?" Lavvy asked.

"Well, miss, what he said I shouldn't like to repeat; but he made it plain that either he or those as holloaed were going home."

"But how did he know for a certainty?"

"He happened to see a bit of fur on a bramble on *top* of a hedge. The worst of it is it makes one a bit suspicious, and I don't say I haven't lost a run in my time by not going at once to a holloa that didn't sound right. But don't you mind, miss. It won't be done again in a hurry."

"And you don't think it was my fault?"

"Couldn't have been, miss. You weren't able to get to them at startin', and it's a marvel to me, from what Ned says, that you got to them when you did. I've run a fox to ground in those brickfields more than once, and I know the country."

Perhaps Messrs. Murdock and Browne owed much to that interview.

Now, if there was much searching of hearts and disappointment amongst those whose day's sport had been cut short, Victor Bickersdyke was not one of the number. Having seen what he wanted to see, *viz.*, his aunt make no attempt at hunting the hounds, he walked leisurely home, taking Cranston on his way. It struck him as being a dull spot for any one without country pursuits. He neither fished, nor shot, nor hunted, and agriculture was a pursuit to which he had no leaning. The redeeming feature was, of course, the money; that could do a good deal. He could let the place and live elsewhere; but after all it was Lavvy that he wanted. He had a great liking for her; she was cheery, energetic, likely to be popular and would take an immensity of trouble off his hands.

Lavvy was, however, a difficult person to deal with. Whenever he had suggested matrimony he got a snub; he didn't mind that, for he felt certain that Bickersdyke, the wealthy man, would differ as a suitor from Bickersdyke, the virtual pauper. One of the chief difficulties would be that Lavvy would be staunch to her aunt; but supposing he agreed to advance no claim to Cranston, provided Miss Badsworth made a settlement on him, how would it be then?

There is nothing like a good opinion of one's self to assist in removing obstacles or breaking down the wire entanglements in the preamble of a scheme. Walking slowly, and so occupying a considerable time, Victor was surprised when Majendie rode up behind him.

"Home so soon!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

Majendie told him in that hollow, jocund strain, wherewith some endeavour to turn a fiasco into a success.

[illegible] and now I will be
You must [illegible] damned fool
[illegible] it's a thing often done t
one is any the wiser. It just ha
an old well and the girl found hi

"Miss Lavinia Badsworth, ple

"Very good—Miss Lavinia
planned, too, for we got the houn
though, of course, I had seen he
idea she could ride like that.
piloted her over that brook which

The name of Morgan put Victc
remembered that Jack had to be
he asked:—

"Do they know you had a hand

"They don't know; and beside
from the barracks at Mulchester ha
as I. Of course it depends upo
I didn't know he had been disc
Lavinia till after Badsworth and M

"I wouldn't give much for H
frightened a bit," Victor said. "I
have every one against you. We
agreement."

"No, thank you. Richard—"

If Miss Badsworth did not hunt the hounds to-day, it's impossible that she can complete the calendar month of November."

Victor was silent; he was thinking of Jack Morgan whom in his previous castle building he had forgotten.

"Well, you had better go home and think of a reply to a note you will probably get from my aunt if Hart peaches, which he will to a certainty. She can write pretty straight, as I know from experience."

"Oh! that's soon done," Majendie replied airily.

. . . . . .

When by-and-by Bickersdyke was announced, Jack Morgan felt no surprise; but he was annoyed, because he fully intended going over to Cranston, and, if possible, having an interview with Lavvy. It was, perhaps, rather unfair of him to associate Majendie's "drag" with Victor Bickersdyke, but such was the case nevertheless.

The mutual greetings were formal and strained, but there was something of the preliminary crossing of swords in the conventional words.

"I have called on you as the executor of my late uncle's Will," said Victor when he had taken a seat.

"Yes? Light up." Jack pushed a box of cigarettes across the table. "What's the matter?"

Victor did not know exactly why Jack's manner disconcerted him. Though he was much more abstemious than he used to be, he wished that Morgan had offered a drink as well as a smoke.

"You are aware, of course, that Miss Badsworth abstained from hunting the hounds to-day, and this is the first of November."

"The second, I fancy," looking at the almanac on the table.

"The first day of hunting in November, I meant."

"Quite so."

"Anyway, Miss Badsworth did not hunt the hounds."

"Lucky for your friend—what's his name—she didn't;

never saw a woman so put out in my life; I verily believe she would have separated his body and soul with her hunting whip. I trust he has cleared out for he will have the whole country about his ears, and naturally you are supposed to have aided and abetted him as he is only what you might call a strolling player, but Hart held his tongue about you personally."

Victor had come to ride the high horse, but he had difficulty in sitting on him.

"I knew nothing about it, and care less. I have only just heard from Majendie what has occurred."

"Oh! *I* don't doubt it, Bickersdyke; the other folk are the people to be reckoned with. It's all over the place that Majendie is subsidised by you, or says he is, and that will be a hard matter to get over with angry people."

"Never mind, Morgan, I didn't come to talk about that; the provisions of my uncle's Will have not been carried out. What are you going to do?"

"As yet I have only your word for it," Morgan replied slowly. "The assertion is being made before me for the first time, and consequently I should like you to explain more fully."

"Surely it was plainly set down that Miss Badsworth was to hunt the hounds for one calendar month, *viz.*, the month of November?"

"I think you are making a mistake," Morgan said.

"Mistake! How can I make a mistake when the words are set down in black and white?" He dived his hand into his pocket and produced a copy of the Will.

Jack Morgan took no notice beyond unlocking a drawer, and, after turning over some papers, producing a copy in his turn which he slowly unfolded and laid on the table before him. After pretending to read the document and wondering all the time how any godfather and godmother could have named a child Lavinia, he looked up and asked, "Well, Mr. Bickersdyke, what is it?"

"What is it?" Victor queried in his turn. "November

has begun, the hounds have met, and Miss Badsworth hasn't hunted them."

"There is going to be a frost, don't you think? It's quite possible hunting may be stopped, perhaps to the end of the month. What is going to happen then? There is provision made for nothing but illness."

"It doesn't matter in the least; I can prove that on one day the hounds met and Miss Badsworth did *not* hunt them."

"Yes, I suppose you could prove that easily enough, but I can't see what difference it would make."

"You appear to be a very dense sort of man, Mr. Morgan."

"Perhaps I am," Jack replied with a smile. "I certainly do not see that whether Miss Badsworth hunted the hounds or not would make any difference."

"You don't? Then perhaps you will understand me when I say I shall get an injunction."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait till the end of November? there would be more time for your friend's little trick to blow over."

"I don't see why I should wait," Victor said.

"Of course you can do as you please."

"Naturally."

"You will have to swear an affidavit."

"Probably."

Jack Morgan took up the copy of the Will and perused it once more before he said:—

"What are you going to swear to, Mr. Bickersdyke?"

"That on the 2nd of November Miss Badsworth did not hunt the hounds."

"Well, there is certainly no harm in that, only it has not got much to do with the case."

"I consider it has everything to do with it," Victor said hotly.

Jack got up from his chair and leaned against the mantelpiece with his back to the fire. He would dearly have liked to give Bickersdyke a piece of his mind, for there was a self-

sufficiency in his manner which was irritating, to say the least of it; but the worst of the whole matter consisted in the impression which Jack had that in a court of law Miss Badsworth's case would be more than shakey. In fact, Jack's object was to gain time.

"I can understand, Mr. Bickersdyke, that after a superficial view that would be your opinion," he said.

"What on earth do you mean by superficial?" Victor asked hotly.

"You have fallen into the error of supposing that the portion of the codicil in Mr. Hugo Badsworth's Will is capable of only one interpretation?"

"Certainly. It's plain enough."

"You said you are prepared to swear that the conditions have not been complied with?"

"I should have no hesitation whatever."

"In fact, that Lavinia Badsworth has not hunted the hounds?"

"Cer—— What do you mean?"

"Only that I think you would commit perjury. Lavinia Badsworth has hunted them." Jack spoke calmly and deliberately, though the mere mention of the name made him feel inclined to cast forth his visitor into the outer darkness of a November night.

Victor looked at him, his mouth open with astonishment, and then Jack said:—

"I knew Mr. Badsworth possibly a great deal better than you did; he was a thorough sportsman, and had got together one of the best packs of hounds in the kingdom. He might have cared little for the property in his sister's hands (for it was a matter which could easily be righted) whether it deteriorated or not; but his hounds—— The Squire, though he took little notice (if any) of his brother or his niece or you, was well posted in all that concerned the family, so he merely put a little more depth into the puzzle and left out any qualifying title to the name of the huntsman or huntswoman. You will observe, Lavinia Badsworth

is spoken of; there is no 'my sister,' 'my niece,' 'the before-mentioned,' or anything else. Now, what are you going to swear about?"

Victor's ideas were shaken up like the colours in a kaleidoscope; the new light shed by Morgan on the clause looked clearer and brighter than was warranted by the state of the case. Jack Morgan thoroughly enjoyed his discomfiture.

Presently Victor recovered himself and made a clutch at the apparently vanishing prospects.

"Oh," he said, "that's all rubbish! Of course it's the same Lavinia all through."

"It *may* be," Jack said. "If I were you I would take counsel's opinion."

"By Jove, so I will!" Victor ejaculated rising.

"Don't forget to state the case properly! Have another cigarette, it's cold outside. I fancy we *are* in for a frost."

When his visitor was gone Jack whistled softly to himself, then the whistling ceased. "I wonder where the deuce he put it?" There was, naturally, no response, but Jack's train of thought led up to a greatcoat and a brisk walk to Cranston. Wily young man! He knew that on hunting days Miss Lavvy was wont to write up the ledgers and conduct the correspondence which fell to her lot in the library before dinner.

There was a marked difference between the reception accorded to Jack Morgan and that which had obtained in the case of the two young cavalry officers, though Jack, not having been present at the former interview, was unaware of it.

Reaction had set in, in fact had been setting in for some time, so that when the butler announced "Mr. Morgan," Miss Lavvy was quite her usual self. At all events her welcome was bright and cheery.

"There's a frost, no end of a frost, with an attempt at snow. I shouldn't wonder if we didn't hunt for a fortnight," Jack said cheerfully, as he drew his chair to the fire at Lavvy's invitation.

"And you a sportsman and fond of hunting! Why, dad hates a frost and I am sure Uncle Hugo did!"

"Well, I'm glad, even though it be high treason to say so in this room; I am glad because—because it will do good. A hard frost restores the balance of nature, kills the grubs and things, you know."

"Really!" Lavvy exclaimed, shading her face from the fire with a small Japanese screen. "Since when have you become so ardent an agriculturist, or horticulturist, or whatever you are? Perhaps after to-day you are as disgusted as I was."

"Was? That's good, I'm delighted to hear it. I feared you might take that scurvy treatment to heart. You appeared so angry that I thought it kindest not to condole."

"And it was kindest," Lavvy replied with a quick little glance from behind the screen. "I really was unfit to speak to any one, but now let me thank you for that timely piece of pilotage; we should never have got up as we did but for that."

"Oh, that was only a matter of experience. You see I had bathed in that brook, horse and all, at least three times in my life, insomuch that I made a special expedition to find a practicable place, and the old horse I rode hopped over just there in cold blood, and on a Sunday afternoon, too. 'Now, had this horseman been at home or jumping on dry ground,' you know, ought to have been the moral, only it wasn't. Of course hounds have never run that way since until to-day. May I compliment you and the Banker? I hope Miss Badsworth isn't angry with me for deserting her, but you know when other horses are going that King Rufus of mine is hard to hold."

"I daresay. The pony, as they call him, did go well." Lavvy acknowledged a singular sense of gratification in the way in which Jack intimated so much without actually saying it. "Auntie has written what dad calls 'a corker' to Captain Majendie, and she and I have just had two separate interviews with two young officers from Mulchester."

Jack looked up quickly, and again for some reason the girl smiled before she gave a graphic account of her share of the affair.

"I trust Miss Badsworth gave them 'what for,'" Jack said at the conclusion of the narrative.

"I expect she did. Auntie can be very dignified when she likes, but they were nice, gentlemanly young fellows, and abject in their apologetic state, so she healed their wounds, if she had inflicted any, by giving them tea before they went home."

"The deuce she did! Just like her; it's really hard lines that she should have all this extra annoyance. And what did *you* do?"

"I? I told them it had nothing to do with me; and then I quoted Beckford, which had exactly the same effect as if I had quoted from the Koran. I think, Mr. Morgan, they were puzzled with me. They were so surprised to see me clothed and in my right mind (at least that is what their uneasiness suggested), that I imagine when auntie sent them on to me they expected to find the original of 'The Foxhunter's Return' which is in poor uncle's bedroom."

Jack laughed. "I daresay," he said, with a lively recollection of his own anticipations at Dewthorpe. "Did you give them tea also?"

"No. I was very lofty and dignified, and, as I said, quoted from Beckford and showed that the use of a trail after hounds were entered was not advisable. Eventually I was stiffly bowing them out when I noticed they looked so woebegone and ashamed of themselves that I gave in, shook hands with them and told them not to do it again."

Jack looked at her for a second or two, enchanted by the merry smile called up by reminiscences of her visitors. "Just like *you*," he said.

"But what else could either auntie or I have done, Mr. Morgan? Had we been men, we could have stormed and sworn and frightened the poor things, perhaps, but whatever auntie may have once thought of equality, there is little

doubt that the same words in a woman's mouth would not have the same effect. As it is, I am inclined to think we have helped to make two sportsmen."

"Not a doubt of it," Jack said heartily. "I wonder if you will succeed with Majendie."

"I'm afraid he is what dad calls a 'wrong 'un,' Mr. Morgan. Those youths told me that they (they never gave away any one else) were responsible for three pounds, and Bill Hart, you remember, declared he had only received ten shillings, and had the promise of a sovereign if he got to the river."

"Um! very likely; but the mention of the man reminds me of your cousin, Bickersdyke. I have just had a visit from him; he is naturally rather a big man after to-day."

"Was he in the conspiracy, too?"

"No, I don't think he knew anything about it; his interest in the day's proceedings centred in your aunt, and when he saw she took no part beyond acting as master, he evidently considered it to be his turn to play, so he started by calling on me to ask what I was going to do."

"And what did you say, Mr. Morgan? It was rather a difficult question to answer, was it not?"

"I should have *liked* to say a good many things, for he was rather aggressive; however, I contented myself by putting things before him in a new light, and telling him he was quite mistaken in the view he took, that though there were two Lavinias, there really was only *one*—I mean, of course, capable of doing the work, and that no doubt your uncle knew it. Bickersdyke is going to take counsel's opinion."

"Have you any idea what the result will be?" Lavvy asked anxiously.

"In the first place, we shall gain time. Counsel's opinion may be anything, it won't commit itself either way, and very possibly will leave a sort of pay your money and take your choice state of things." Jack looked round the room. "I feel sure that somewhere here is the key to the whole matter.

Your uncle was a hasty man who frequently sat down and wrote a violent letter on the spur of the moment when annoyed; it relieved his feelings, but he has told me many a time that he always slept on these effusions and they were seldom sent. If hunting is stopped, wouldn't it be well if we had another search?" (Wily young man!)

"I suppose it was the necessity for this which made you rejoice in the prospect of frost?" Lavvy asked demurely.

"Er——" Jack hesitated; then his honesty came to the rescue. "No, it wasn't exactly that, it was because *you* would get a rest, and there would be fewer days in the month on which you would run the risk of accidents, rain and cold, and—too much work. There now, if you are angry, I can't help it."

"Why should I be angry?" Lavvy asked. "I think it's very nice of you to care."

"Care?" Jack exclaimed, drawing his chair a little closer, and then the door opened.

"Alfred Diccox would like to see you, ma'am," the butler said.

Jack stood up, and the rueful expression on his face was extremely comic.

"Don't say it!" Lavvy exclaimed with the fascinating twinkle in her eyes. Jack looked at her doubtfully. "I mean," she went on, "what you were thinking of Diccox. We will make that search if the frost lasts."

"May it freeze until November 30th," Jack ejaculated, as a gust of wind nearly bereft him of his cap outside the front door. "There is no saying what may happen; people forget that a huntsman's horse is often half blown before a run begins." These words might have seemed vague in their meaning had any one been by to hear them.

Alf Diccox was shown in in his Sunday best, and shuffled nervously from foot to foot in the lamplight.

"I looked in, mum, to say it weren't altogether my fault I miscalcurlated."

"What is the matter, Alf?" Lavvy asked,

"Well, it's this here drag. I never thought as you'd draw them clumps, and I came along the road so as to meet you, and you went t'other way. I see Bill Hart up agen the Ashbed when there was beer at Casselton, and I says to myself, says I, there's summat up, and——"

Lavvy listened to the outpouring of Alf's story (experience had taught her that to cut it short was to increase the number of heads), and when it concluded lamented together with Alf that the keeper's unusual plan had prevented the discovery of the plot. "Well, I hope Bill Hart won't do it again," she said.

"No, mum, no," Alf replied meaningly. "I doubt if he'll do it again."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SHARP frost, a cold wind and an inch of snow set the meteorologists to work to amend their forecasts; they had fortunately appended "unsettled" to their prognostication of mild, foggy weather, and now from back attic, or such places in which they lie low, came the voices of prophets who foretold the hardest winter of the century with a boldness which might have encouraged the unwary to believe that they had something to do with the arrangements.

The white landscape and the black branches of the leafless trees caused Miss Badsworth to wonder whether there were any of her poorer neighbours who were short of fuel and blankets. Those who belonged to the coal club would be supplied; but there were others, so Miss Badsworth, who had become vastly practical in the last few months, sallied forth in snow-boots to see for herself.

So it was that, just beyond the church, she encountered Alf Diccox with his terriers and a bag over his shoulder, which was every now and then disturbed by convulsive movements which indicated that ferrets were within endeavouring to make themselves comfortable under adverse conditions.

"Wintry, mum!" he said, as he touched his hat. "I was just goin' to step up to the house to ask if the young lady would lend me her little dog; he's a wonder with rats, that dog is."

"I'm afraid we are in for a spell of very cold weather, Diccox," Miss Badsworth said.

Alf looked up at the dull, leaden sky as though he had not observed it before that day.

"Mebbe," he replied. "There'll be more where this here come from; but my father always said" (Alf was too cautious to take responsibility where it could be avoided) "that a frost and snow early in November meant a mild time till after the days lengthened; and I judge he was right, mum."

As Miss Badsworth walked on she was feign to confess that, after all, these people, though prejudiced, used their reasoning powers more than she had been led to expect before she became acquainted with them; she had learnt to observe their methods of life and respect their independence, which was closely akin to pride, and she had come to the conclusion that they were far better fitted for the stations they occupied than those who, having been raised by artificial means, and told that they were ill-used and down-trodden, were left to sit like fledgelings on the edge of their nest with no parent birds to feed them. It may be for this reason Mrs. Dickinson's frequent appeals to Miss Badsworth for support fell upon ears which now analysed the sounds, instead of taking them as gospel.

In the meantime Miss Lavvy, with numbed fingers and toes, was exercising hounds upon the road. The snow was crisp and did not ball, and hounds travelled fairly well, looking odd and dirty against the white background.

"This is the worst part of the whole business," Lavvy thought. "If it goes on I shall send the men out alone. Joe Summers is right—'it ain't a job to hanker after'." There is a drawback in most things, and in Lavvy's case the uncertainty of what would happen in the future, and the fear that all her work and self-sacrifice would go for nothing, were always behind her in the character of black care.

She was just wondering which of many specifics would be the best for chilblains, when a man cutting hay from a rick a field away shouted to another approaching with a waggon.

Ned pointed with his whip and turned in his saddle to say "There's a fox coming across the ground, ma'am". It was by way of caution that all hands might be prepared.

He was surprised by the query :—

"Can we ride, Ned, do you think?"

"There's no frost in the ground to speak of, ma'am; the snow fell early."

Lavvy glanced down, both packs were out—thirty-four couples.

A hundred yards further on the fox crossed the lane and leisurely cantered over the adjacent field.

"He's going across to the Home Wood at Cranston, Ned. I wonder what sort of scent there is in snow? Open that gate, I'm going to try."

The question of scent was answered the moment the pack crossed the line of the fox. They swung on to it with a rare burst of music, which drowned Lavvy's cheer, and away they went.

Jimmy Edwards at Tod's Farm was shooting some spinneys with some friends, and had just taken up his post at the further end of one, when a fox, evidently in a hurry, dashed through the fence close by him, and at the same time a blood-stirring chorus of hound voices came from the rising ground a quarter of a mile away.

"Durned if there ain't the hounds!" he shouted to Jack Morgan, who always made one of the party at Tod's Farm. "They must have broken away at exercise."

But this idea was soon dispelled by Lavvy's clear "For'rard, for'rard!" and the sight of three black-looking figures who were getting along as best they could, using gates and gaps whenever available, but without any attempt to interfere with the chase.

"What a scent there is! There must be every hound in the kennels there!" Edwards said excitedly. "Lord, I wish I'd got a horse instead of a gun!"

"That's an awkward place down there," Jack said anxiously, watching the girl in front on the roan. "She's over! Bravo! Bill's down; no, up again."

The hounds crashed through the little spinney and were out the other side and away in a twinkling. The three riders made a detour through the farm buildings, unaware

of the spectators who were running to get a further view from higher ground.

Joe Summers was returning from what he called "the Hospital" twenty minutes later; he was, as has been stated, a methodical man, and this was the hour for a bit of lunch. Suddenly he stopped to listen. "Hounds," he muttered, "and running hard." Then he retraced his steps and entered the "long paddock".

A long, narrow plantation sheltered that paddock and several others from the north, extending for nearly half a mile; towards one end of this the old man walked. For a minute there was silence.

"They must have got away at exercise," Summers muttered. "I expect they've stopped 'em. Bad riding, but it isn't what you might call hard," digging his heel into the turf.

The sound of a horn dispelled this theory. "Lor', if they ain't hunting! Now they're right again."

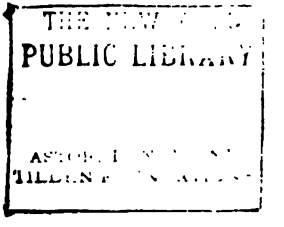
The old man was correct in his conjecture that a blown fox had entered the plantation at the far end. Just beyond it hounds in their eagerness had overrun the scent at the point where their quarry had made a sharp turn to reach the strip of covert. Lavvy had been down once, but was close at hand to put them right; they had come along at a great pace without the semblance of a check.

"For'rard, for'rard, for'rard!" Summers heard in the distance, and his old eyes gleamed as the sound of hounds running, which he loved so well, reached him.

"It's terrible dangerous," he thought, but he could remember doing the same thing himself years ago.

He kept his eye on the spot where the plantation ended, thinking at any moment he would holloa the fox away. Nearer and nearer the hounds came; Summers could hear the crackling of the undergrowth and the sound of a galloping horse.

"The fox must have gone before I came in sight," he thought. "No, there he is." They overran him and he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"'HOLD UP,' A CHEERY VOICE CRIED."

slipped out into the ditch of a transverse fence. Hounds caught a view, and the old man saw the end was near; the leading couples were close to their fox; it was a matter of moments; a sharp double, a snap, and it was over.

"Hold up," a cheery voice cried. A roan horse crashed into the fence, there was a blunder, some snowy fireworks, and then a slim, red-coated figure rose from the whitened earth and dived into a growling, struggling mass, with just enough breath left for a clear "Whoo! whoop!"

The old man bustled up just as Ned arrived through a gate lower down.

"You ain't hurt, ma'am, I hope?" Summers asked anxiously.

"Not a bit, thanks. Take my knife and do the honours, Summers," Lavvy replied. "Baik, Sexton! Abigail, get away. Twenty-seven minutes from the lane at Little Croft Farm, as hard as they could split." She was warm enough now with the flush of excitement on her face.

"It was terrible risky, ma'am," Summers said, taking off the mask with the skill of a professional carver.

"Really it didn't ride badly, and we were lucky with the gates. I believe it really was safer over the country though things did look big and black."

The worry was over, and carried out in a style which Summers fully appreciated.

"You didn't draw for him, did you, ma'am?"

"No, no; I was terribly cold, and I confess I hadn't got over yesterday when a man turned a fox out of a hayrick, and then somehow I felt bound to go. There was a splendid scent, and, Summers, there was no field in the way."

Summers contemplated the little lady with the same satisfaction on his face which reigned there whilst he looked over a favourite hound. (Lavvy looked small in her hunting kit.) "Lor', ma'am," he said, "if you only had had the luck to be a man!"

Now, was it a compliment or not? Lavvy took it as such.

"I suppose you mean that if I had been a man I shouldn't

have been foolish enough to lay thirty-four couples of hounds on the line of a fox in the snow."

"No, ma'am, no; though there would be few men who would have had the courage."

"Or the ignorance?"

"P'r'aps; but what I meant was you'd have had the making of a huntsman."

"And haven't I got it?" laughing.

"Yes, ma'am; you seem born to it, but——" (the old man looked about for some words to soften his remarks) "it ain't your place—excuse me, ma'am, you're too good for it."

Lavvy thought that probably many years had passed since the kennel huntsman had paid a compliment without qualifying it. She raised her cap and said laughingly:—

"Thank you, Summers, I don't know that I can accept all that, but I do know that you mean what you say."

"Well, ma'am, if you won't take it amiss, don't forget the snow will soon be through them boots."

. . . . . .

Now, had Miss Lavinia Badsworth, the younger, been aware that Victor Bickersdyke was awaiting her return in the library, she would have gone to her room by another route and changed her costume before she awarded him an interview. It was her custom, however, to make use of a side door, as her uncle had done before her (a "bolt hole," he called it), and so it came about that she entered the library to deposit her whip and horn, and suddenly became aware of her cousin's presence.

Her first impulse was to retire precipitately, but there was a smile on Victor's face which had the suspicion of a contemptuous sneer in it; being a Badsworth that decided the matter at once.

"Good morning, Victor," she said; "I've only just got back from exercise."

"So I should presume," he replied, eyeing the little figure in the unconventional garments in a way which put Miss Lavvy's hackles up.

"I wanted to speak to you on an important matter," he went on.

"I trust you won't be long, for I have been in the snow, and my—boots are wet; of course if you are not in a hurry I will go and change."

"You don't seem in a very good temper," Victor said. "I have my doubts about your returning if I let you go."

"I'm in the very best of tempers; we found—but you wouldn't understand it. Go on, tell me what you want." Lavvy's tone was not very gracious, but then she had an idea of part, at least, of what was coming.

"I'm going to take counsel's opinion on this business," Victor said.

"So Mr. Morgan told me last night."

"Oh! he did, did he? Last night?"

Victor would keep looking at her top-boots and the two or three inches of white buckskin breeches which showed below her red coat.

"Yes; of course you are aware he is the sole surviving executor, and Aunt Lavinia, being what I believe is called the other party, he was bound to mention your intention."

"Mr. Morgan——"

"Really, if you are going to talk about him I think I'll go and change. You keep staring so at me."

"I beg your pardon; but you know it's such an unconventional costume."

"That it doesn't suit your artistic taste. You ought to know by this time, Victor, that there is a reason for it, in fact that I have no choice."

"Well, I am prepared to make a compromise, if Aunt Lavinia will make a reasonable settlement on me, and you ——" with another doubtful glance at the boots.

"I should advise you to ask Aunt Lavinia first; the money must be the important consideration, and you wisely put it first. I don't know whether she is at home."

"Please don't interrupt me, Lavvy. Of course we should want enough to live on, but if you would—I wish you

wouldn't wear that dress" (whether by accident or design Lavvy had turned back a part of the flap of her coat and displayed a small knee with a neatly tied bow at the side of the snowy buckskins).

"I perfectly understand you, Victor, a sum of money and me, or me and a sum of money, that's the price of your not interfering with Aunt Lavinia's share of the business. In fact, the truth is that your chance of upsetting auntie's claim is about as shadowy as it can be, and you want me to be a party in making the best terms that can be made on your behalf. Now, if I were you I would talk it over with Aunt Lavinia and see what she says. What are you going to do with Captain Majendie?"

"Oh, he's off."

"Off? Has auntie's letter frightened him away?"

"No; Aunt Lavinia's was strong enough, but old Lady Flora Parkfield finished him. She wrote things pretty plainly and concluded by saying that if the arrangement between him and me was ever carried out she would close her seven coverts to the hounds and destroy every fox on her estate."

Lavvy looked at her cousin with a peculiar smile as she said, "I thought the dear old soul would be angry".

"You'll marry me, Lavvy, won't you?"

"My dear Victor! Without the money, perhaps! You go and see auntie, and I will give you my answer on November 30th. Now, I really must change."

Victor didn't like the dress, it seemed to damp his ardour, and, though he would have scarcely acknowledged it, what Lavvy had said about consulting his aunt had its weight. So he went.

Scarcely was he gone when there came the sound of boots kicked against stonework to remove inherent snow, one or two quick steps and a knock at the door, to which Lavvy replied with permission to enter.

"Forgive my intruding in this way," said Jack Morgan's voice, which preceded his body, "but are you all right?" There was anxiety in the question. "Upon my word, I

believe you are," with an eager look at the girl's face. "I saw the hounds running up at Tod's Farm, and you—and I dreaded some mishap and have run down to find out." Jack's breath was still coming quickly.

"I am perfectly safe," Lavvy said with a smile which rewarded Jack for his run. "I don't think it was as risky as it looked, for the ground was quite soft, but I begin to think it was a foolish thing to do; we had twenty-seven minutes of the best and killed close to the kennels."

Lavvy felt it rather embarrassing to have Jack's eyes fixed admiringly upon her; unlike Victor's, they never fell below the level of her scarfpin, so she went on to tell how the matter had occurred. "Summers performed the last rites, and paid me a compliment," she said in conclusion.

"And didn't you get a fall?" Jack asked.

"As a matter of fact I got two, but I managed to stick to the reins," Lavvy replied laughing.

"Are you perfectly sure you are not hurt?" Jack asked gravely.

"Perfectly sure, but snow up one's sleeves is annoying. I've had an interview with Victor since."

"Oh, hang him; nothing matters so long as you are all right. By the way, though, you are wet, you must be—snow would go through those boots like brown paper" (he never glanced at them even). Run and get a hot bath and a change. I'll go back to Jim Edwards; he is as anxious as I was."

"So I will," Lavvy said, going to the door. She looked back through the doorway and said, with a light in her eyes which the shadow of the peak of her velvet cap could not conceal, "I expect auntie will want you to come to dinner; she is having a business talk with Victor. I really am not hurt, not even stiff."

Lavvy distinctly heard Jack mutter "Thank God!" though what he spoke aloud was "All right! I shall be there if required."

. . . . . .

In her interview with her nephew Miss Badsworth was careful not to commit herself. She listened without making any remark or comment. Victor was disconcerted; what appeared to be so easy as he had walked over, suddenly changed its aspect. Miss Badsworth's eyes, which were steadily fixed on him (save once or twice when according to habit she wrote something in pencil on a sheet of paper), disturbed his equanimity as much as Lavvy's top-boots and buckskins had done, so he began afresh two or three times and then came to grief at the same place.

"As far as I can gather, Victor (for you have not put the matter very clearly), you want me to give you a certain sum of money (to be agreed upon), and then if some other contingency occurs, which you have not specified, you will be content to withdraw all claim to your uncle's property and in no way to dispute the Will or its provisions. Perhaps you will tell me the other condition."

"It's not quite a question for you to decide, aunt."

"Then how can it come into the matter at all? You and I are the only parties concerned, and therefore it seems to me we can only consider things within our power."

"It might come under your influence, aunt. The fact is, I want Lavvy to marry me."

Miss Badsworth shifted uneasily in her chair. "So much money and Lavvy, is that it?"

"That's near enough, aunt."

"Then I must plainly and flatly decline to do anything of the sort. Either I have a right to this property or I have none; there is no middle course. I have managed the estate and all that is connected with it, and Lavinia Badsworth has hunted the hounds. If that is not in accordance with your uncle's Will I can't help it. You have got to prove it. As for your marrying Lavvy, you must settle that with her; as for purchasing your silence or anything of that kind, I can only tell you I am not that sort of person. That your uncle should have cast this firebrand amongst us puzzles me much."

"Of course, aunt, if that is your decision, the law must take its course," Victor said loftily.

"I suppose so; but from what your Uncle Charles and—others say, there is no great certainty about it."

"I suppose you mean Morgan."

"Does Mr. Morgan say that?" Miss Badsworth asked sweetly.

Victor didn't answer; he rose and departed, as his aunt thought, rather rudely.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE projected search for another Will was carried out most thoroughly; every nook and corner was investigated in turn. Besides the failure in finding any document, there were other drawbacks from Jack Morgan's point of view. Miss Badsworth lent all her energies to the task and Miss Lavvy had a cold in her head.

At Allington and Mulchester markets the sporting element foregathered for the midday ordinary, and much discussion followed, with the "drag" on the opening day as the subject for debate.

It was not a good debate, for the speakers were all in favour of one side of the question; but the steps which Miss Badsworth and Lady Flora had taken (with many additions and few subtractions) were canvassed and approved, to be eventually eclipsed by the report that the Cranston Hounds had run for over an hour in the snow and killed their fox at the kennels. When Jimmy Edwards put things right with regard to time the impression was left that the pace must have been good.

Sporting papers, glad of copy in a frost which looked like being of a lasting nature, gave graphic accounts from eye-witnesses and imaginary biographical sketches of Miss Badsworth and her niece, so it was not surprising that curiosity was aroused; and when Alf Diccox's (or rather his father's) prognostication came true, and another fall of snow terminated in rain and a rapid thaw, there were many who made up their minds to run down and have a look at this new-fashioned menage.

Numerous were the requests for sittings, for interviews,

for permission to take a series of photographs of Cranston, etc., which Miss Badsworth received, and Miss Eugenia Spook, "A Smart Woman" in the *Lady's Empire*, went so far as to enclose a sort of examination paper containing twenty-seven questions, with a request, couched in terms which at once gave the examiner away, that Miss Badsworth would fill it up and return it without delay.

"I like the woman's impudence," Miss Badsworth said.

Lavvy regarded her aunt with a droll smile.

"Let us fill it up, auntie. It's so delightfully vulgar that we might conscientiously say in reply that 'tripe and onions was your favourite food; your amusements consisted in eating and drinking, quoits, skittles and pig-sticking; that in order to keep your hand in you invariably accompanied the village butcher'. Only you mustn't send your photograph, you dear."

"Lavvy, I'm glad to see your cold is really better; you haven't been in such good spirits since that upset we had on the second."

"I suppose it's reaction, auntie, or the 'Homes of England' prospect. 'Miss Badsworth at her charming house at Cranston, fully illustrated!' 'Ah, here you are!' (welcoming visitor on front steps. You would have to borrow my kit.) 'This is my workshop' (with a view of the library). 'This is where I do my Sandow's exercises' (a few ropes and things in the servants' hall). 'Here I keep my top-boots.' 'A corner in the larder.' (We might get some hares and sew foxes' brushes on to them and hang them up by their tails with 'yesterday's bag' on a placard.) 'Now I must go hunting; good-bye.' It would be lovely, auntie."

"You are not often sarcastic, Lavvy," her aunt said, tickled, nevertheless, by her niece's humour.

"Do you know, auntie, when a man is a snob one rather pities him for knowing no better; but when a woman exhibits the same failing it's forty times worse, besides being irritating, because one feels she must have *learnt it* on purpose. Another instance of inequality to my mind, and

though the view may not meet with approval from you, auntie, you couldn't be anything but a lady however hard you tried."

"I see what you mean, Lavvy," Miss Badsworth replied thoughtfully, "but still I think when women strike out a line for themselves they are often misjudged."

"Isn't the 'line of their own' often a copy of a bad model, auntie? Doesn't the copyist frequently act on the supposition that she has discovered something which nobody else knew before, whereas to men it has been a matter of course from boyhood?"

Miss Badsworth sighed as she looked up at the portrait of her late brother and then regarded Miss Spook's examination paper.

"There was certainly more in what your uncle said than I thought at the time. This uncertainty worries me, Lavvy."

Miss Lavvy reached over and stroked her aunt's hand as she said:—

"Only three more clear weeks, only six or seven hunting days if the weather is open."

"Yes; but what will happen then?"

"It's rather awkward, because I am bound to hunt the hounds till the end of the month, and dad thinks if Ned Barlow had a bye-day or two it might complicate matters. He will have to take his chance, but no doubt he will do very well."

"I wasn't thinking of *that*," Miss Badsworth remarked.

"I suppose I shall have to accept Victor's offer," Miss Lavvy said, looking demurely at the table, and her aunt's eyes turned quickly to her. What they saw I don't know, but she smiled as she replied, "I suppose you will have to".

Lavvy felt the necessity of a diversion.

"Those gilded negative monograms will come in for all these people, auntie, and with our experience of Mrs. Dickinson before us, I should suggest you offer to mount 'The

Smart Woman' if she happens to be in the neighbourhood. That will—cook her goose, if I am not mistaken."

"Don't take to slang, Lavvy."

"Not if I can help it, auntie, but you must allow my present position to be rather demoralising. I quite pride myself that I haven't sworn yet, for I can well understand that there are circumstances (I expect I have met them myself) where a few strong words with no particular meaning would be an intense relief. However I hear that Captain Majendie has departed, so there is one incentive the less."

"Is he gone? Do you think I was too——"

"No, auntie. Lady Flora is responsible, dear old soul."

Everybody called and many condoled with Miss Badsworth on what they termed the insult of the opening day. As few had managed to get away, and consequently the majority had had no share in the gallop, condolences were the more sincere. Mrs. Silas Tucker, filled with anxiety as to the success of her husband's shooting party, though she understood that an affront had been offered, gave it as her opinion that if that method of sport, a drag, were universally adopted, there would be no need of foxes, and no anxiety about their eating all the pheasants.

The Duchess and Lady Susan were full of indignation, real or feigned, but then their main object was to discover where Miss Badsworth got her silk hat which became her so well.

Victor Bickersdyke laid the conditions of his uncle's Will before a London solicitor with a view to obtaining counsel's opinion thereon. Mr. Forbes, of the firm of Forbes, Drencher & Forbes, sent Victor away under the impression that matters favoured the other side, though he did not put it in so many words.

Charles Badsworth interviewed Messrs. Bailey with a view to rebutting his nephew's claim. Mr. Bailey, senior, dwelt strongly on the fact that one Lavinia Badsworth being specially mentioned in the first part of the codicil, it would be difficult to prove that another was referred to in what he called the November clause.

Charles Badsworth said "It was all rubbish to suppose that, knowing his sister as he did, Hugo could have contemplated her attempting to carry out the conditions". To which Mr. Bailey replied (after drumming on the table for a minute or more) that "Mr. Badsworth was a hasty man; that something had upset him when he drafted the codicil, and that it was probable that he never weighed results at all".

Each client consequently came away with the usual impression under such circumstances that the opposite side was the favoured one.

To Miss Lavvy fell the lot of keeping up the steam required to drive the Cranston machinery; and yet with the fields increased in size, and the country deep and holding, for two days in each week she had more than enough to do.

"She stands it wonderful, but it's too much for her," Joe Summers said to his wife. "And, mind you, I know what it is."

It was nearly eight o'clock when the hounds had arrived at the kennels that evening, owing to one of those untoward circumstances which are generally to be found recorded in the annals of the very best packs.

A large field had assembled at Garston Green. Every one seemed anxious to try and make amends for the occurrence on the opening day, so that both Miss Badsworth and her niece found themselves surrounded by those anxious to congratulate them on the thaw, and to learn from Miss Lavvy the details of her gallop in the snow.

"You must try and keep all these people in order, auntie," the girl said, just before she went on to draw.

Miss Badsworth did her best, but when twice a fox, after considerable persuasion, made an attempt to go, and was headed back two fields away by carriages, motors and bicycles on the road, and when holloas sounded from various points of the compass, the scattered horsemen and horsewomen got completely out of hand and the prospects of sport were at a discount.

Still Lavvy persevered, in the hope that her fox would be compelled to try the opposite end of the wood, but he was of an obstinate disposition and for the third time tried to make his original point. For the third time Lavvy quickly got her hounds away; it was a close, muggy morning, the rides were deep and holding, so that the chestnut horse she rode was lathering freely under his breastplate.

A chorus of yells went up once more from the blocked road, and young Sorter was standing up in his motor waving his hat and looking, in his goggles, like a diver who had suddenly become a lunatic.

"He's gone back again!" he shouted as Lavvy reached a gate close by.

She was ruffled; to get away appeared quite hopeless, and as yet she cared nothing for "masks on the kennel door". "He's as likely as not a good fox," she thought; "it would be a pity to bring him to his end by sheer mobbing."

"We saw him go back!" Sorter cried, and at the same time many hands pointed in various directions.

"Hold your noise, please," Lavvy cried generally. "You are enough to frighten anything," to Sorter in particular. "Hounds, please."

She opened a gate on the opposite side of the road and cantered across a field with the hounds, closely followed by Ned and Bill Sheppard.

Sorter put his hands to his mouth and shouted:—

"He's gone back!"

"How I should like to swear," thought Lavvy, taking no notice of the shout. "There is no road within half a mile of Clip Gorse, thank goodness!"

Miss Badsworth and Jack Morgan met Alf Diccox, who promptly pointed with his stick as he said:—

"I think the young lady's gone across to Clip."

Jack bethought him of a line of gates and said to his companion: "I expect she is disgusted with all that hard work for nothing and is gone to shake off the crowd. We had better get on."

It was only when a little later the sound of hounds running in the distance reached them that the members of the field, who were leisurely discussing their sandwiches under the impression that the morning's programme was about to be repeated, were galvanised into life.

"There's mostly a fox lies in them roots, sir," the tenant of a small holding, sitting on a gate, remarked to Lavvy as she passed. "There ain't no one been near 'em to-day," he added as the girl pulled up and hesitated. For a wonder that fox was there, and Lavvy's cheer and the notes of her horn reached Jack Morgan and her aunt. It is to be feared the former forgot his companion, as he made a bee-line for the flying pack; but Miss Badsworth was, as usual, well mounted, and, having profited by experience, went in a manner which would have surprised the Duchess had she been present.

"Thank goodness there is plenty of room," Lavvy thought, for though hounds ran well for a quarter of an hour, after that time they were repeatedly brought to their noses. It was clear that scent was bad, and on the arable land it well-nigh failed altogether.

Joe Summers' speech at the puppy show occurred to Lavvy: "The farther you go the farther you gets left," and on the other hand was Peter Beckford's advice to leave your hounds alone as long as they could own a scent at all.

In the meantime reinforcements straggled up eager to get on each time the pack raised their hopes by running briskly for a couple of fields.

Miss Badsworth had her work cut out, but she asserted her authority, and forcibly rebuked a certain dealer from Mulchester who was clearly anxious to sell a horse to Miss Lavvy from the way in which he exhibited unnecessary equestrian feats in the immediate proximity of the hounds.

A distant holloa forward just as Lavvy had got her second horse helped matters for a time, and hounds chumped along for twenty minutes on better terms; but eventually there was a relapse to slow hunting and much work for the huntsman,

until presently all trace of the line disappeared. It was half-past three and a grey mist was already veiling objects. One by one the members of the field had dropped away till only half a dozen were left. Miss Badsworth's horse had cast a shoe and Jack Morgan's had badly stubbed a fetlock joint. Jimmy Edwards, of Tod's Farm, was there, but then he was a hound lover as well as a hard rider.

Poor Lavvy had had quite enough of it, but she was a Badsworth, and it must be remembered that a difference exists between stopping your hounds and losing your fox.

In the next field a shepherd was pitching hurdles. He might have been deaf and dumb and blind so unmoved did he appear by hounds and horses in his immediate neighbourhood. He drove his iron bar into the ground with stolid regularity.

"That man knows all about it, miss," Edwards said, riding up to Lavvy, who was watching her hounds endeavouring to put things right for themselves. At that moment the shepherd's dog came cantering back through a gateway with lolling tongue.

"That dog has coursed the fox," Lavvy replied. (It had been no unusual circumstance in Cornwall.)

A touch of the horn and she rode for the gateway through which the dog had returned.

A wide circle was almost complete, and Lavvy was just thinking she had better give up and go home when Wayfarer hit the line beside a fence, and once more progress was made. But the dusk was falling rapidly and dropping shots a mile away in front were to be heard. A covert was being shot, so home was the word, and home was fourteen miles away.

(It is very probable that the fox which entered "the last corner" in one of Silas Tucker's coverts just as the final show of birds was about to be made, and caused the majority of pheasants to break back, was the hunted fox; of course I don't know, but it seems likely. Anyway, there were no hounds to blame.)

Jimmy Edwards was always good company, and whilst he undertook to show the shortest route consistent with approaching darkness, he drew on such store of anecdote and reminiscence that Lavvy almost forgot how tired she was. No doubt she would have preferred Jack's company, but his absence was explained.

Ned Barlow's figure in front had become dim and indistinct when Edwards advised a short cut by means of a cart tract which would save a mile or more. As it happened the result was unfortunate, for there was a cutting with high sloping banks on either side which increased the darkness, and just as this point was reached Diana, or whoever it is who presides over scent, must have been seized with cussedness; a fox had crossed this ravine leaving a burning scent, and in a twinkling hounds were scrambling up the steep side, drowning all sounds of rating in their eagerness.

There was no possible exit for horses even in daylight.

"There's a gate on in front," Jimmy shouted.

So there was, and Nettlethorpe Wood a field away with its forty acres on a slope looming up on the sky-line.

Then began one of the most arduous undertakings which as yet had fallen to Lavvy's lot.

Ned Barlow plunged bravely into what appeared black darkness (in daylight it would have been a fairly straight ride in the covert), and Sheppard and Jimmy made the best of their way up either side. Lavvy, as the rallying point, remained by the gate listening for a pause in the chorus which in the stillness of night must have been heard for miles.

The cracking of whips and the "Gar away baik!" indicated the position of the horsemen, whilst an occasional "Hold up!" proved that to them there were times of discontent.

"What a scent there is! Every hound must be speaking to it," Lavvy thought. It seemed an eternity as she sat in the misty darkness before there came sudden silence, then she blew her horn.

"Gar away baik! gar away baik!" and the sharp crack of

a whip indicated that Ned was near the centre of the covert. Lavvy's hopes rose, and she blew her horn again. But no; a single hound spoke. "Capstan, bother him," she said to herself, and in a few seconds the tide of the chase set in her direction in full flood. She rode slowly under the fence and cracked her whip; if they got away there was no saying what would happen; to her relief hounds turned sharply at an angle, and she galloped back to the gate and entered the ride and got to their heads. It was hardly possible to see anything distinctly, and how many hounds were there she couldn't tell, not all certainly, for there were some running above. She got back to the gate, blowing her horn as she went, with difficulty keeping the hounds she had got with her. It was a relief by-and-by to hear Ned's voice, "Come along, Coop!" as he descended the ride. "I've got some, mum, but I can't see how many," he said when he arrived.

There was, luckily, a farm hard by, and it was decided to put what hounds there were into some shed and return for the rest.

A cow-man with his lantern was at the gate, wondering, as he said, "what was up". The lantern's light revealed twelve couples, which left the balance at seven and a half still running in the wood.

The impossibility of getting anywhere with any certainty delayed matters; time after time when the chance seemed to offer of stopping hounds they turned sharply away. It was nearly seven o'clock when Lavvy made a third or fourth attempt and rode up the ride once more; the gap in the trees overhead was the only certain indication of its direction. Ned came down the opposite way, cracking his whip; he could just see the grey horse in front of him. Suddenly the cry turned to a growling scrimmage, rather prolonged, but that was unnoticed.

Lavvy slipped off the grey and tried to force her way into the underwood, but branches met her in all directions. Fortunately the stolid cow-man appeared armed with his lantern, and Ned quickly appropriated it. The hounds were cleared

away from the grey carcase of a badger, which declined to be broken up; he had died gamely, as one or two hounds proved.

"Will you lead those horses away to the gate?" Lavvy called to the cow-man. "How many are there here, Ned?"

"We can tell better in the ride, mum," he replied, holding up the lantern. "He'll make the cow-man a weskit," he added, picking up the badger.

A short and long note on the horn, repeated three times, conveyed to Edwards and Bill Sheppard that Lavvy was going away, and a quarter of an hour later the homeward journey was resumed.

"All's well that ends well," Jimmy Edwards said. "That cow-man will tell the story so that it will be remembered for generations and the waistcoat shown as evidence."

"All I know is that making history can be hard work at times," Lavvy replied.

By the time Jimmy Edwards insisted on a halt at Tod's Farm, "that the men might have a glass of ale," he had proved that the accident which had caused so much delay was not without parallel. Lavvy always recollected that after ten hours in the saddle Mrs. Edwards' home-made sloe gin was a welcome pick-me-up.

The butler at Cranston informed Miss Badsworth that "Miss Lavinia would take her dinner upstairs, as she was going to bed".

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOVEMBER slipped by as November does in a hunting country. For the most part the weather was mild and open, there being only one day when a sharp white frost rendered hunting doubtful in the early morning. Atmospheric conditions may have favoured the Cranston, at all events the sport shown compared well with that of neighbouring packs.

The 29th, which was a hunting day, dawned bright and still (possibly too bright), and whilst Lavvy dressed for her last day in office, though she was glad enough to hand over the responsibility, she experienced a tinge of sadness at the thought that the deep voices of the hounds, amongst which she had worked so hard, would shortly learn a greeting for some one else. "The Reformer," seated on the window-sill, watched the progress of his mistress's toilet; he knew that the costume meant a hunting day, but whether he was to go or not was another matter. Lavvy rose from the process of drawing on a pair of top-boots and caught sight of the dog's anxious face.

"It's all right, Johnnie dear," she exclaimed, taking the dog's black head between her hands and kissing his forehead, "it's my last day, so you shall come; to-morrow we retire into private life, and I don't know that I am altogether sorry."

Whereupon the terrier, whether he understood or not, jumped down and sat in solemn expectation by the door.

The post brought two documents for Miss Badsworth; the first was a letter from her nephew enclosing a copy of counsel's opinion on the case submitted. There was nothing

very decisive in it, in fact it bore evidence of close affinity to a certain learned judge's directions to the jury at the close of his summing up: "If, gentlemen, you agree that the boy be the boy, then it is your duty to find the boy guilty; but if, on the other hand, it is your opinion that the boy be not the boy, then you must give the boy the benefit of the doubt".

"Victor pays and takes his choice," Charles Badsworth said. (He had come up to make future arrangements.) "Hugo *was* an ass, though he was my own brother."

Miss Badsworth smiled as she remarked:—

"I am not certain that he was, looking at the matter from one point of view, at least." She handed the second document to her brother.

"Well done, Lavvy!" that gentleman exclaimed.

"What have I done now, dad? I gather it is something good." Lavvy had entered the room at the moment and caught the words.

Charles Badsworth looked at his daughter proudly after receiving his matutinal kiss.

"If you had only been a man, Lavvy!" he said.

"Oh, I am tired of hearing that, dad. Joe Summers has said the same. Well, I am glad I am *not*, there! I might have got over head and ears in debt, taken to drink, married a barmaid, or done something towards breaking your heart."

"You might—yes. Get on with your breakfast and hide your blushes whilst I read this."

The document was a very carefully worded request that if she did not find it too great an inconvenience, or too much of a tax on her strength, Miss Lavinia Badsworth would consent to carry the horn and continue in an office in which she had displayed such proficiency. About threescore names were appended, with the Duchess's and Lady Flora Parkfield's at the head.

"It's for auntie to appoint her hunt servants," the girl said demurely.

Miss Badsworth laughed. "It's all quite correct, my

dear, it's addressed to me, but I wouldn't ask you to accede against your will. The work and the tie are too much for any woman."

Both her brother and niece laughed heartily, but Miss Badsworth took the sting out of their mirth by saying, "Well, I mean it. Hugo was perfectly right."

"I'll take time to consider," Lavvy said. She had glanced down the list of names; Jack Morgan's was not there.

It was at Mr. Silas Tucker's request that the Cranston met at Berryhead. A spread was provided with which the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London could scarcely have found fault. That it was overdone goes without saying. Fortunately there are on such occasions some, at all events, who are ready to feed, and when Mr. Tucker proposed "Fox 'unting" from the head of his table, there was a very tolerable assembly present to drink the toast.

Miss Badsworth, naturally, attended the function; and Mrs. Tucker gyrated round "the dear Duchess" and Lady Susan with an affability which was almost servile. Lavvy remained with her hounds, and declined all invitations to the spread; but round her there gathered an admiring crowd, and one and all congratulated her on the capital sport she had shown during the last week. For this, no doubt, a good gallop from Casselton (forty minutes to ground with a clever bit of hound work in the middle) was responsible, though the cavalry division inclined to a twenty minutes' scurry from Blackthorpe, which ended in a fair and square kill in the open, when hounds had had the best of the horses all the way.

"You are sure to find," Silas said with confidence, as he stood with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, after having personally conducted the butler to Lavvy and waved a benedictory hand over a tray of liqueurs. "I tell my man that it is quite possible to show birds and foxes too." Considering that no fox had been seen during four days' shooting (save the one which came from somewhere else), Lavvy thought the assertion a bold one; in fact she was suspicious

of another drag. However the words "I am glad to hear it, that is as it should be," came readily enough, though Silas hardly faced the steady brown eyes as he should have done.

"Look out to stop them, Ned, if there is any doubt," she said to the first whip just outside the first covert, and Ned smiled as he touched his cap and rode away.

It was rather curious that the girl's "Yoi, over in!" had scarcely had time to vibrate on the air before a lusty, though raucous, holloa arose in the covert, but at some distance. Lavvy pulled up and listened; the holloa was repeated, but she made no sign.

Ned Barlow was galloping to the spot as hard as his horse could go, when something caught his eye which made him pull up as soon as he could, turn round, jump off his horse and pick that something up. It was a card on which could be discerned an address, with Leadenhall Market in large letters. Ned slipped it into his pocket and got forward, astonishing the keeper, who was mopping his face, by descending suddenly on him with the question, "Which way did he go?"

The keeper pointed and said, "I got on a bit; made sure you would find about here".

"Ah," Ned replied, looking at the man's perspiring face, "there's nothing like knowing, is there? But they take a bit of carrying." It was no drag, the card was in his pocket, so he drowned all repartee by sending up one of those clear, pure-toned holloas which inspire confidence in the hearer.

The sound of Miss Lavvy's horn, evidently blown as she galloped up a ride, came in reply; and in a few minutes the girl appeared with a strong contingent of hounds at her horse's heels and the rest crashing through the underwood hard by.

There was a pause; hounds feathered on a line, but it was some few seconds before one spoke. Ned touched his cap and handed the label to Lavvy when the keeper was out of sight.

"It's a bagman, ma'am," he said, and then got forward.

Lavvy acknowledged the receipt of the intelligence with an upward movement of her whip, and then she laughed at the reminiscence of the pompous Silas.

The hunt was not a success; hounds were anything but keen, as the fox in a strange land dodged about aimlessly, but by dint of holloas from people in the rides, and perseverance on Lavvy's part (Ned had said "He's mangy, ma'am," as he passed), the end came.

"Put him down a rabbit hole, they won't break him up," Lavvy said, and then mounted and rode slowly out of the covert.

At the gate, Silas Tucker, anything but comfortable on a heavy underbred horse, exclaimed:—

"Ah! What did I tell you, Miss Lavvy?"

"You were quite right, Mr. Tucker," Lavvy replied in a clear voice that all could hear. "I wouldn't pay for him, if I were you; he was mangy. Here's the address in case you want it again. We are going to Hoxton Wood."

Silas turned purple as Lavvy held out the card. Fortunately Mr. Tucker's mount at the moment bucked so vigorously that it was only by clinging desperately to the pommel of his saddle the old gentleman saved a separation. Perhaps that was why people laughed.

Of the middle of that day there is little to chronicle beyond the fact that clouds banked up in the south-west and the wind gradually increased. A half-hearted fox in Hoxton refused to leave, and after much perseverance on Lavvy's part was marked to ground and eventually evicted by "the Reformer". Southerby was blank, and a fox from Tickler's Gorse disappeared mysteriously. Rain began to fall, the wind continued to rise, and the day promised to close down early. Lavvy did not like her last day to end like this. She would draw once more.

From no one knew where a fox suddenly appeared, and hounds ran merrily back to Southerby. It was a nice gallop, and easy fences and good going enabled everybody to reach that covert in safety.

Lavvy plunged into the middle ride, the field making use of a line of gates on one side. At the further end of Southerby is a large, bulbous-shaped excrescence connected to the main covert by a narrow strip of plantation strongly fenced on both sides. Hounds ran straight through the wood, and Lavvy emerged close to the narrow part just in time to see a fox slip away a couple of hundred yards ahead.

With her whistle in her mouth she galloped to the spot, and six couples of hounds came away on the line; she halloaed and blew her horn, but the gale played pitch-and-toss with the sounds, so that no one on the far side heard the signals. As a matter of fact, the main body of the pack were running hard up wind in the direction of a canal, and the field, wide on one side, were galloping for the nearest bridge. Forty minutes later at Hoxton Wood, in the dusk, Ned Barlow had to confess himself beaten, and then the question arose, "Where was Miss Lavinia?" The only approach to elucidation was given by Ned. "There are six couples short and the terrier isn't here; they must have divided at Southerby."

Southerby was miles away.

"She'll probably be at home before we are," Mr. Badsworth said. "We had better try there first."

In the meantime Miss Lavvy, having repeatedly blown her horn and looked behind her in vain, gave her mind to keeping with those six couples of hounds which were running well though down the wind. The rain plashed in vicious squalls and the wind howled in the hedgerow timber, but it was the canal which met her here as it had done the other division that Lavvy thought of. "If hounds crossed, where was the nearest bridge?" For more than a mile the course was parallel to the water, then, just as Lavvy was face to face with an unjumpable obstacle, which necessitated a detour, hounds crossed the canal and took up the line on the other side.

By dint of hard galloping the little huntsman reached a bridge, and then keeping down the wind once more caught

the sound of hounds running. The rain was now a driving drizzle, the landscape grey and indistinct, but scent appeared to hold. A little piece of luck let the girl up to within a field of her hounds, but whilst opening a heavy gate the wind caught it and it struck her just below the knee. Fortunately there was no time for delay, though for a minute or two the pain made Lavvy feel sick and faint. Then it got better, and she was just getting on terms once more and trying to decide whether she should stop the hounds, when the chestnut, who was blown, landed in a boggy place, came down on his head, and sent his rider five yards on in front with all the wind knocked out of her.

Lavvy was perfectly conscious, but for some seconds felt that she couldn't take the trouble to get up.

Three things combined to make her pull herself together: first, she was evidently lying on a wet spot; second, there was the sound of rapid panting, and Jack's black head and wet nose against her cheek; third, a voice which asked "Be yer hurt, sir?"

Lavvy sat up and saw a figure with its head through a sack, evidently a hedger; she reached out a hand to Jack's head before she replied "I don't think so". Then she stood upright and picked up her cap; her knee was rather stiff but the gate accounted for that; it was probably the plaster of mud on one side and the muddy water up her sleeves which made her feel so inclined to cry.

The man in the sack proceeded to try and get the horse on his legs, which was a more difficult matter than he supposed.

"We'ed best let un lay a bit, he's blowed, that's what he is, bless yer." The man spoke cheerfully, after failing in his object.

A second attempt got the chestnut up, but he was dead lame.

"Give hisself a bit of a twist, I spex," said the man. "Better put un in at the farm yonder," he counselled, and they went, he leading the horse; he "minded" many things

which were not exhilarating, though intended to convey comfort.

It was not far across to the farm, but more than once Lavvy stopped to listen for any sign of the hounds; all she heard was the rush of the wind which buffeted her as it passed.

"Maister" was gone to Mulchester with the only horse he possessed, and the sack-beclad man "lotted" 'twas near ten mile to Cranston and four to the town.

Lavvy was wet and depressed, and limped by reason of her bruised knee; the only cheerful person was "the Reformer," he had overtaken his mistress and was content.

Some time passed before Lavvy, having seen her horse stabled, and having given many injunctions, together with half a sovereign to the carter, started "across the grounds" (said to be the nearest way) towards the high road, with the idea of reaching Mulchester and obtaining some means of conveyance, "the Reformer" her sole companion.

The wind howled still, though the rain had almost ceased, but darkness came rapidly on. Lavvy's boots were soaked and rubbed her heels, and she suffered from the feeling of general despondency and bedraggledness.

"If anything could prove that Uncle Hugo was right it is this," she thought as she plodded along. "A man could smoke, and perhaps swear, and I feel inclined to sit down and——" She stopped and listened. "Only the wind, Jack," she said to the terrier. "I made sure it was—it *is!*"

A bell-like note reached her, rising and falling in the gale, and then there was a chorus close at hand. Misery was forgotten. Lavvy ran towards a half-open gate; but just before she reached it a shadowy something paused there, was promptly charged by "the Reformer," and turned in its tracks. Fortunately for the terrier he ran the wrong way at the gate, or in the darkness and scrimmage which ensued his fate might have been that of the fox who, done to a turn, rushed into the jaws of his enemies.

Owing to the dusk and slippery ground, the girl had a difficulty in sorting the tattered fox from the muddy, steaming mass of his victors. Her "Whoo! whoop!" usually so clear, sounded but feeble and utterly human in the face of a gale which mixed it up with the baying of hounds. She got him at last and cleared a space with her whip.

"Phew!" she exclaimed, as the unsavoury odour of fox, wet hounds and mud, concentrated by the shelter of a neighbouring hedge, assailed her as she stood endeavouring to find a knife in her pocket with a wet hand.

"Get away back, do!" as our old friend Rollicker made an onslaught on the carcase which nearly brought on war between him and Jack the terrier.

For one moment Lavvy was influenced by the temptation to throw the whole business to the expectant pack and so do away with the job which she hated; but no, it was her last day and her last fox; she must take a memento to prove her statements.

There was no Jack Morgan, no Ned Barlow, so she set to work. The brush was a success; it came off at the first attempt and was thrust into her pocket. "Ugh!" The mask was another affair. There was torn skin, wobbly stuff, all sorts of obstructions and a windpipe as tough as a bicycle tyre, but it was off at last, grinning and gruesome; the pads might go hang.

"Hey, worry, worry!" she cried, as she tossed the remains aloft; then she blew her horn, after which she went near to being sick, for there must have been blood or something on the mouthpiece. After two attempts Lavvy succeeded in ascertaining that one hound was missing. You may be perfectly sure she carefully wiped the mouthpiece of her horn before she blew it again.

"Purity, old girl!" she exclaimed, as something black and white came out of the shadows, something that should have been black and white but which now had very little white about it. "What a misnomer," she went on, wiping her hands on the wet hound, "however, I'm worse than

you, and after all it's only outside. It's no good—Jack be quiet!" as the terrier breathed threatenings at Purity out of sheer jealousy. "It's no good being squeamish now; I never in all my experience was so utterly filthy."

She threaded the thong of her whip through the fox's grinning jaws and down what once was his gullet, carrying the trophy in the loop.

"Now, then, come along, Coop! I wonder what will happen next."

It was nearly dark by the time the high road was reached; there was no possibility of a lift now, so Lavvy limped bravely along, for had not disaster been turned to success? Nevertheless she could have done without that fox's mask. It was dreary work. Hounds were tired and some lagged behind; and there was no one to put them on, but the girl kept talking to them. If her knee had not been stiff and her heels sore from the slopping of her boots it certainly would have been better.

After a couple of miles of weary plodding the monotony was broken by the rattle of a coming motor car, and in a few minutes the glare of its lamps flashed round a corner. Hounds were probably all over the road, what was to be done? Lavvy thought of her horn and blew lustily. "Poof! poof!" came from the motor. "Twang!" went the horn again.

"Hold hard!" Lavvy cried, blinded by the glare of the lamps. The motor stopped.

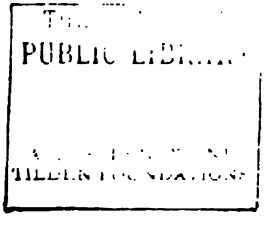
"What's the matter?" asked the driver.

"Nothing now, thank you," Lavvy replied. "It is only that I have six couples of hounds here, and it's pitch dark."

"It is Miss Badsworth, is it not? We passed some one on horseback who inquired if we had seen you. Can we give you a lift?"

Lavvy laughed. "It's very good of you, but I fear we are too many. I must get on. Good night."

It was darker than ever when the motor lamps were gone, and Lavvy had difficulty in keeping out of the roadside ditch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"—— THOUGH HE WORE TOP-BOOTS AND WAS WET THROUGH."

when trees overhung; then she thought of the horseman who had inquired about her, and, on the chance, blew her horn once more. A hail came out of the distance, followed shortly by the sound of a horse trotting on the road.

"Hold hard!" Lavvy cried, as the sound drew near, and a voice from the darkness shouted "Hurrah! Are you all right?"

Reaction must have overcome conventionalities, for the reply was:—

"Yes, Jack; but I never was so pleased to meet any one before. I'm deadly tired of walking."

"Then get on this nag and tell me all about it."

"Don't touch me, I'm all fox and mud."

"Are you hurt or anything?"

"No."

"Then nothing else matters; up you go," and Lavvy found herself in the saddle.

"Phew! What's that?" Jack exclaimed as something clammy touched his face.

"It's this horrid mask. I have slung it on my whip. I'm so sorry."

"Poor little girl! You've had a rough time for your last day, at least I hope it's the last," Jack said, when Lavvy had sketched her adventures.

"You didn't sign the petition."

"No."

"I felt rather hurt."

"Did you? What are you going to do?"

There was a little pause before Lavvy replied.

"I cannot go on if the request is not unanimous."

It was wonderful how Jack Morgan managed to find the girl's hand in the dark before he gave his reasons. He always declares that he never enjoyed a seven-mile walk so much in his life, though he wore top-boots and was wet through. Certainly Lavvy forgot to blow her horn as frequently as she should have done considering that other searchers were out,

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Hot baths and dinner had done something to mitigate fatigue and discomfort amongst the principal inmates of Cranston Lodge, but there was quite sufficient of the former left to preclude any lengthened discussion on "what was to be done next". Having decided that Victor must take such steps as appeared good to him, and that a smart first whip would be necessary, the matter faded away into sublunary affairs.

From the point of view of those present the requirements of Hugo Badsworth's Will had been carried out. Having come to the determination to go to bed early, they ended by sitting up rather later than usual. Lavvy experienced that feeling of contentment which comes to people placed in certain circumstances. Perhaps it was that bruise below the knee which, persisting in making its presence felt, caused her to wrap herself in a cosy dressing-gown and draw an arm-chair to the fire rather than seek her couch and (as usual) fall asleep almost as soon as her head rested on her pillow. At all events she sat and built little castles, and (which would seem most unlikely) went step by step over seven miles of dark and muddy country road, with a smell of damp and fox pervading everything. She sat for an hour, and at the end of that time felt no inclination towards sleep.

"Shut up, Johnnie!" she said, when the terrier's monotonous snoring was broken by an exciting chase in dreamland, which produced *sotto voce* growls and squeaks.

"I'm not the least sleepy, I'll go down and write up the log," she said to herself. "Phew! My leg is stiff."

Candle in hand, she went softly down to the library, pausing for a moment outside her father's bedroom door.

"Hold hard, can't you!" (something inaudible) "Don't you see she wants room?" came in smothered tones from within.

The girl smiled and kissed her hand towards the door.

"Dear old dad!" she whispered. "I wonder if Johnnie was thinking of me, too."

She lit the lamp in the library, made up the fire, which still showed signs of vitality, and seated herself in the oak chair at the writing-table.

It was remarkable that that chair with its heavy carved back, unprepossessing as it was in appearance, conferred more comfort on the occupier than many another upholstered according to the most modern ideas.

Lavvy got out her hunting diary and wrote:—

"November 29th. Clear morning, gale and rain later. Nineteen couples and a half mixed. Berryhead; breakfast and a bagman to follow."

Then she stopped, laid aside her pen, put her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her hands. A soft light came presently into the brown eyes which were apparently looking at nothing in particular.

She was evidently thinking aloud when she said:—

"Dear old Jack! How faithful and good he has been, never worrying me as he might have done (I wonder if I should have been worried?), never getting cross, just the same as when I saw him first, only—bother! I thought Johnnie was too sound asleep to miss me." A gentle scrabble had sounded at the door.

Lavvy pushed back the chair as she rose, but her bruised knee came in contact with the leg of the writing-table; in stepping back quickly owing to the pain, she trod on her dressing-gown, overturned the chair, and only saved herself from falling with it by a desperate clutch at the table.

To her it appeared that the falling chair made noise enough to raise the whole household, but nothing came of it so she opened the door to admit the dog.

"So you missed me, then," she said; "look what you made me do; come and help me put things straight."

"The Reformer" wagged his tail, gave a little snort of satisfaction, trotted to the overturned chair, snuffed round it, and drew a long investigating breath somewhere underneath it.

"There are no mice there, Johnnie," the girl said. "Why——"

A half-open drawer beneath the seat made her pause and quickly raise the fallen chair to its normal position, another moment and she had drawn forth a well-worn, brown, small quarto book and a smaller volume, Peter Beckford's *Thoughts on Hunting*, and the late Squire's sporting diary; from the former protruded two inches of a long blue envelope. Lavvy opened to it, thinking of the dead hand which had placed it there and last touched those books. The superscription on the envelope was clear enough, though written in pencil: "My Will. Hugo Badsworth. March 23rd, 19—"

A thrill of excitement ran through the girl, but she was cool-headed enough to note the chapter in the opened book, and to read the words underlined, and marked in the margin.

"In such a country as this" (full of riot) "you that know so well how necessary it is for a pack of foxhounds to be steady, and to be kept together, ought not to wonder that I should prefer an excellent whipper-in to an excellent huntsman."

Lavvy turned the envelope over, it was open at the flap, and in another moment a sheet of foolscap was spread upon the table.

There were the usual preliminaries and a statement that the document superseded all other wills and codicils.

"To my brother, Charles Badsworth, of Dewthorpe, near Tordon, in the Duchy of Cornwall," etc., etc. (everything, as it appeared to Lavvy), concluding with the hope that he would continue to keep up a pack of foxhounds and hunt the Cranston country as it had been hunted for more than half

a century. Lavvy noted the legacies were similar to those contained in the former will with the exception that "my niece, Lavinia Badsworth," was on a par this time with "my nephew, Victor Bickersdyke".

The girl's hand shook a little as she kissed the signature.

"Dear old dad!" she said at length. "How we have abused poor Uncle Hugo."

The next thing was to examine the drawer. There was a catch on one side, near the end, and a little research revealed a small knob in the framework of the chair. There was also a lock, but the key was inside the drawer. Any one seated in the chair could reach down and press the knob, that is to say, if they happened to know where it was situated. It is needless to say Lavvy experimented with the empty drawer before she replaced the books and Will exactly as she had found them, taking the precaution of locking the drawer.

Having written a note to Jack Morgan bidding him come over early, as it was important, though nothing was the matter, and placed instructions on the slab in the passage that it was to be sent when the horses were exercised, Lavvy folded a rug, laid it on the seat of the chair, together with her handkerchief, and instructed "the Reformer" to see that no one touched it whilst she was absent. She could afford to lie awake until morning now. As a matter of fact, Clara Diccox, who brought the usual cup of tea at seven o'clock, had to say "If you please, ma'am," three times before she could convey the intelligence to hearing ears that she "couldn't think what was the matter with Jack, but he wouldn't let Sarah" (the under housemaid) "go near the oak chair in the library".

"Oh, never mind; tell her to leave it alone," Lavvy said. And this Clara thought was odd also.

. . . . . .

"It will be very difficult to get a really good hunt servant so late in the season as this," Mr. Badsworth said at the close of his breakfast. "I don't know what we shall do."

"Beckford says a good first whip is more important than

a good huntsman," Lavvy remarked, with a twinkle in her eyes which neither uncle nor aunt noticed.

"Beckford had some queer experiences with his huntsmen if all he says is true, Lavvy. I have often wondered what sort of a fellow he was to whom Peter wrote. It never was clear to me that he was worthy of the compliments paid him. Some of the implied questions were those of one in complete ignorance of his subject, and then again Beckford speaks of him as possessed of experience."

Charles Badsworth got up from the table and looked at his brother's portrait.

"Don't go far away, dad," Lavvy said. "I shall want you presently."

"I am only going to the stables," was the reply.

"Auntie," Lavvy said, as the door closed, "I found uncle's Will last night. I thought Jack—I mean Mr. Morgan—as executor should see it first. Cranston and the estate generally goes to dad; you——"

"Thank God!" ejaculated Miss Badsworth. "That is exactly as it ought to be. Tell me all about it, Lavvy."

A watchful pair of eyes noted the approach of a tweed-clad figure coming across the park at a brisk pace, and Lavvy promptly went to meet the comer, doing her best to conceal a limp. It was a sunny morning, for a white frost had followed the rain and gale, and now the light fell on the girl's curly hair as she came.

"My darling, how lame you are!" Jack exclaimed, seizing her hands with both his own.

"Oh, it's only a bruise," Lavvy replied.

"Only a bruise! How you remind me of that morning at Dewthorpe when my new world began. I got your note, but I was coming over, because Rogers called last night (you remember he married the head housemaid from here) and asked if we had looked in the drawer of the oak chair in which you sit to write; his wife says there is a drawer."

"Is there one? Under that chair? Let us go and look."

With difficulty Lavvy concealed any signs of mirth as Jack passed his arm through hers.

"I must go and see your father first, little girl."

"Business should have the preference, Jack."

"Business be hung! But that is business, the most important I have ever undertaken. When I have got your father's consent it won't matter twopence if we make another fruitless search."

"But how about my curiosity? You will have to give me my way sometimes. Hadn't you better begin?"

"Haven't I begun—all this time?" with a little nudge.

"Yes, Jack; if you hadn't been an angel you would never have spoken to me again; but somehow I knew, and I think you knew."

"Of course I did, dear" (with a squeeze of her arm). "Well, we will just have a peep at the chair."

"There *is* something here," he said, holding the chair so that it balanced on one leg. "A keyhole, at all events."

"It's a very odd thing, Jack" (Lavvy appeared to take a pleasure in putting in the name as frequently as she could), "we've searched high and low for Uncle Hugo's Will, and now we light on this hiding-place which I have sat upon every day since I have been here. Sarah Rogers and then you must not have all the credit. Before you go any further, so as to obviate any disputes afterwards, I will tell you that the drawer there contains two books, one of which is a copy of Beckford. At chapter eighteen you will find what we have been looking for."

Jack Morgan glanced up in astonishment.

"What? And you knew it?"

"Yes, at 1.15, or thereabouts, this morning, I upset that chair and the drawer slipped out."

"He didn't leave it all to *you*, Lavvy?"

"Why?"

"Because" (hesitatingly) "it might make a difference."

"Might it? I don't see the reason. No; the property goes to dad. Here is the key."

Jack unlocked the drawer and fumbled with it.

"I must give another proof of discovery," Lavvy said. "There is a knob underneath, you must press that."

Jack sat back on his heels as he knelt on the floor with the open drawer before him.

"I've seen the late Squire put a book under his chair many a time, but I thought he put it on the floor, the carpet is thick, you know."

For some time the two sat very close together, whilst Jack read the Will aloud. After sundry comments he said :—

"Lavvy, dear, this rather upsets my plans."

Her face fell ever so little as she asked the reason.

"Don't you see it becomes a serious question which subject I broach first."

"Oh, ask for me first."

"Why ? "

"Because dad is more likely to say 'no'."

His arm stole round her slim waist—well, never mind, we will pass that over. Several minutes elapsed before she kissed her hand to him in the doorway, and said :—

"I'll tell dad you want to see him."

"Before the door opened again it seemed to Jack Morgan that he had walked the best part of a mile up and down the room.

"Good morning, Morgan; nice day, but we are in a pretty good fix; I'm glad you have come over." Mr. Badsworth came briskly in.

"It's a wonderful fine day," said Jack. "I have—er—an important question to ask you; in fact, sir, I want you to consent to my marrying your daughter."

Charles Badsworth's genial manner changed, and for quite a minute he looked at the carpet in silence. Then he glanced up quickly and said :—

"I suppose it was bound to come somewhen. I think, Morgan, I would prefer you to any one else I know as a son-in-law. I always have said that when the time came Lavvy should choose for herself. I presume she has done so."

Of course Jack was ready with a full explanation.

"By the way, I noticed your name did not appear in the list which accompanied the petition which people sent to Lavvy through her aunt."

Charles Badsworth's eyes twinkled as he spoke in a manner which reminded Jack of Hugo's portrait.

"No, it did not," Jack replied.

Charles Badsworth laughed. "Take good care of her, that is all I ask."

"There is another important matter, sir," Jack said, when the first convenient pause occurred. "To me it is of secondary importance, but at the same time it gives me great pleasure to tell you; I have here a later Will of the late Mr. Hugo Badsworth than that which we have had to act on. To me it appears to be fully correct, and the two witnesses are alive."

Then of course much time was spent.

The news travelled fast.

Lady Flora Parkfield pulled up her cobs to ask Alf Diccox after the welfare of his invalid daughter. After a suitable reply and favourable allusions to both Miss Badsworth and her niece, Alf overflowed. "They do say, my lady, as the Squire's right Will has been found, Mr. Charles is to 'ave it all. You see, ma'am, my daughter Clara she valets the young lady." This was by way of accounting for the rightful possession of the news.

"Dear me! Really, you don't say so!" her ladyship exclaimed, and then drove straight to Newnton Lodge.

"My dear boy, I do congratulate you," she said as she was shown in. "I came on at once when I heard it. Just as my cobs have got used to motors in the ordinary way, Toby Sorter must needs crawl under his and kick his legs about; however, I didn't go far up the bank, and now tell me all about it. I am so glad."

"I thought you would be, Lady Flora. You know she is the very nicest girl——"

"Nicest girl! What? You don't mean to say—I

thought it was Charles Badsworth, Alf Diccox told me. Ah, I see, we are talking of different things; have you really settled it? Well, I'm *more* glad; but that will keep and you be none the worse. I hear a Will has been found."

Jack gave the desired details.

"Well, to be sure, and exactly what one would have expected of Hugo. What does Miss Badsworth say, and the nephew?"

"I think Miss Badsworth is more pleased than any one, and I've had a bad half hour with Bickersdyke; he seems to think it's a plot of mine and an injustice to himself; he is going to shake off the dust off his feet on us and go abroad, so he says."

"Well, Jack, I daresay he is disappointed, but he must be the only one in the kingdom who believed in that arrangement as final. There is one comfort, the estate won't be wasted on lawyers. I'm glad we sent that petition, though you didn't sign it; I see now—not that I hadn't some idea before. She's a wonder, that little girl of yours. Now I must go on to Cranston. Come and dine—no, going to Cranston, of course. Well, don't forget to come and see me *soon*."

. . . . . .

"Charles, I congratulate you," were her ladyship's first words. "I used to call you Charlie, but that was long ago, when you never even apologised for pulling my hair down, and I suppose we are older in some ways now."

So she went on in her genial heartiness, going from one matter to another, but leaving a sense of her nature upon every point she touched. When she was gone there came a pause, a calm, after what had been a breezy time.

"I hope you will make your home with me, Lavinia," Charles Badsworth said to his sister. "I shall miss Lavvy when she goes; but perhaps you will want to go back to London, and——"

"My fads? No; I find things different from what I imagined them to be, and I don't grudge poor Hugo his

grim joke. I am not quite sure whether Lavvy or Lady Flora has impressed me the most. We always got on in the old days, Charlie."

"So we did; we have missed a good deal of the middle distance of our lives—I don't know why."

"Nor I," Miss Badsworth said.

. . . . . .

It was Christmas Eve when Charles Badsworth and his sister entertained the tenants and retainers in something of old-time fashion. Lady Flora Parkfield, who was present, insisted on proposing the health of Miss Lavinia Badsworth, which she did in her own peculiar style, with many parentheses and deviations from the theme. Finally she called on Jack Morgan to respond, and the enthusiasm waxed high.

Jack had hardly resumed his seat before Joseph Summers, clad in his red coat and with a near approach to a smile on his face, passed behind the guests on one side of the table until he reached Lavvy's chair.

In a few words he said he had been deputed to ask Miss Lavinia's acceptance of a "momentum" of the time when she had carried the horn with so much credit to herself and the Cranston Hounds. "Those who lived saw strange things, and if things hadn't happened as they had, those who had seen them might have gone to their graves in ignorance that such things could be."

It was rather involved, perhaps, but Lavvy, who rose to her feet with a flush of surprise and pleasure on her face, knew that with the case which the old man offered her there came a compliment which was the more valuable on account of its rarity.

A silver hunting horn bearing a suitable inscription reposed in that case upon ruby velvet.

Lavvy's words of thanks, few though they were, were received with rapturous cheers.

"Might I make so bold as to ask you to blow it, ma'am?" Summers asked with the familiar upward sweep of his hand.

Lavvy smiled at the request.

"Which?" she asked taking the horn from its case.

"Blow 'em away on their fox, ma'am."

Lavvy put the mouthpiece to her lips and then she lowered it; the laughing eyes looked at the old man before she said:—

"I can't, Summers, he hasn't been holloaed away."

Summers looked up and down the room.

"You had better upset that excuse, Summers," the Squire said, laughing.

The kennel huntsman put his thumb in his ear, and all present expected to hear a holloa for which he had been noted, but the thumb was withdrawn and no sound came until he said:—

"I can't, ma'am, I haven't seen him."

"Then the covert is blank, Summers," Lavvy said, and blew the horn accordingly.

As Joseph Summers resumed his seat, he muttered to those within hearing, "It's difficult to get the better of *her*".

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